

THE UK'S BEST-SELLING DRUM MAGAZINE

**RHYTHM**

*Presents...*

# 100

# DRUM HEROES

The greatest drummers of all time *interviewed & profiled*

UPDATED FOR  
**2015!**

**FEATURING** RINGO STARR DAVE GROHL BUDDY RICH JOHN BONHAM  
KEITH MOON TRAVIS BARKER JOEY JORDISON STEWART COPELAND  
GENE KRUPA COZY POWELL MIKE PORTNOY MITCH MITCHELL  
IAN PAICE LARS ULRICH CHARLIE WATTS & MANY MORE

Future







# Welcome...

*...to Rhythm Presents 100 Drum Heroes, a unique collection of interviews and profiles from the makers of Rhythm magazine!*

**T**here's no question that drummers really do bring their personalities to their instruments, and in doing so can be just as influential on the sound of the artist they're backing as any of the musicians involved. Perhaps more so. No two drummers sound alike - each has his or her own quirks, unique flair, learned techniques (or bad habits!), and their sound is a combination of all those things with the feel they bring to the rhythms.

Drums can be inventive and intricate, wild and loud. There's a world of difference in the edge-of-a-trainwreck brilliance of The Who's wildman Keith Moon and the subtlety of a session genius like Steve Gadd. The 100 drummers included in this bookazine has each brought something special to bear on the music for which they are best known.

Take any of the great tracks on which our Drum Heroes played and remove their beats, replacing

them perhaps with a programmed drum machine beat, and you'd lose so much of the music's personality and enduring appeal. Drums are both the backbone and the soul of music.

So it wasn't easy to compile our list of 100 Drum Heroes for inclusion. Not because there aren't a hundred, there are far more than that and the hardest part was deciding who to leave out. Drummers and fans of drumming all have their opinions, and you're a discerning lot. But we hope we've covered a diverse array of styles and genres, as well as generations, of the greatest drummers who have ever graced a drum throne.

This is not a list of the *best* drummers, necessarily, it is 100 players - nearly all of whom have been interviewed in *Rhythm* magazine since its 1985 inception - who have inspired, and continue to inspire, players to pick up sticks and keep the art and tradition of the drumset alive and kicking. Enjoy!



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# John Bonham

Led Zeppelin's John Bonham was a master and commander of the drums whose powerful sound and style has influenced generations of players

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**J**ohn Bonham's forceful personality and no-nonsense approach to life both helped shape his drumming philosophy and underpinned his success as a performer. He hit hard and drove his bands with relentless energy. But there was a subtlety to his work that earned him the respect of fellow musicians as well as the admiration of wildly enthusiastic audiences.

In an era when drummers were as famous as singers and guitarists, Bonham was rated alongside his peers Ginger Baker, Keith Moon and Mitch Mitchell. His showcase solo 'Moby Dick' was a concert showstopper, while his contribution to Led Zeppelin's recordings underpinned and shaped many of their greatest hits, from the surreal 'Dazed And Confused' to the hypnotic 'Kashmir'. Drummers veered in many different directions during the turbulent '60s. Conflicting influences from jazz to funk and rock'n'roll often led to confusion in the rhythm section. John Bonham's great achievement was to lay down the law for rock drumming. He combined power with simplicity, emphasised time-keeping and insisted the drums should be loud, forceful and resonant.

When Bonham took charge he meant business and extracted maximum power from his hardware. A crackling snare, deep-throated toms, pulsating bass drum and spine tingling cymbals all played their part in creating a conveyor belt of rhythm. Nobody appreciated this more than bandmates Jimmy Page, Robert Plant and John Paul Jones. Joked Robert, "John was the greatest drummer in the world. I know, because he told me so!"

Bonham's tragically early death in 1980 robbed the rock world of a major player and led to the demise of Led Zeppelin. But he had become legendary during his lifetime, thanks to his unstinting contribution to Zeppelin's classics and a charismatic stage presence. The moustachioed man in the bowler hat and boiler suit, growling over his drums and battering out the explosive riffs to 'Whole Lotta Love' and 'Rock And Roll' became an enduring image.

When Led Zeppelin first burst upon the scene in 1968, Bonham was regarded as an upcoming player. Yet his fame then was mainly confined to the Midlands. Like his pal Robert Plant, he was one of the 'new boys'. Zeppelin's founder Jimmy Page had formed his new group out of the ashes of the Yardbirds with the aid of his manager Peter Grant. The guitarist had first harboured ideas about using a 'known' drummer such as BJ Wilson from Procol Harum. But when he met Robert Plant the singer enthused about the man who had powered up so many local groups including his own. Jimmy took his advice and set about recruiting the man they nicknamed 'Bonzo'. Even so, it took some doing. Strong willed and stubborn, Bonham wasn't keen on joining a revived version of the Yardbirds. Only a stream of pleading telegrams got him to see sense. But where did all this power and confidence come from? Strong working class roots certainly helped.

John Henry Bonham was born on 31 May, 1948 in Redditch, Worcestershire. His father and grandfather (both called John) ran a building company called JH Bonham. Our John had a younger brother Michael and a sister Deborah, who later became a singer and band leader. John was expected to join the family firm and work on the building sites. But at the age of five he began showing an interest in playing drums and eventually his mother Joan bought him a real drum for his 10th birthday.

He got a complete kit when he was 15: "It was almost prehistoric," said John later. "Most of it was rust. But I was determined to be a drummer as soon as I left school." John was so keen, he vowed he would play for nothing, and he did for a long time. But his parents stuck by him and his dad sustained his interest by taking him to see the Harry James Orchestra with Sonny Payne at Birmingham Town Hall. Sonny's stick-juggling expertise sparked Bonham's desire to be a showman, as did an appearance by Gene Krupa in *The Benny Goodman Story* movie.

The teenaged Bonham developed parallel skills as a carpenter, builder and drummer. He played with school

A Mod' by the Senators. He began listening to American R&B drummers and tried to combine their big, open sound with his acquired jazz rudiments and rock'n'roll feel. All these elements became the basis of the Bonham sound.

In 1965 he joined A Way Of Life, a group that included bass player Dave Pegg, who later worked with Fairport Convention and Jethro Tull. Pegg says that when the band tried some demo recordings, Bonham was banned from the studio and pronounced 'unrecordable'. Bonham laughed about this years later. "I got blacklisted in Birmingham and they said, 'You are too loud. There's no future in it.' Nowadays you can't play loud enough." Bonham sent the engineer who excluded him a Led Zeppelin Gold Disc with a note saying, 'Thanks for your advice.'

In the same year, at the age of 17, he married his sweetheart Pat Phillips. Money was tight and they lived for a while in his father's touring caravan parked in the garden. As a married teenager now with a baby son, Jason, he was penniless. Needing money to support his family he began working at a high-class tailors. But the lure of the music scene proved irresistible.

## HIS GREAT ACHIEVEMENT WAS TO LAY DOWN THE LAW FOR ROCK DRUMMING. WHEN BONHAM TOOK CHARGE HE MEANT BUSINESS

group The Avengers and began sitting in with other bands such as the Blue Star Trio. His mate the late Cozy Powell remembered his boisterous behaviour on the Birmingham club scene. "Bonham's idea of a good night out would be to go and jam with local bands and demolish the drum kit."

But John took playing seriously and went for lessons with big band player Garry Allcock. Gary: "We'd sit in the front room with sticks and a practice pad and I'd show him a few things. I told him to take it steady and he certainly hit hard." Allcock showed him that double strokes could make him even more powerful. "Then we set up some kits in the front room and he was a quick learner, although half the time we talked about cars. We became good friends and when he first began recording with Robert Plant in the Band Of Joy he showed me a cheque for £600 that he spent on a second-hand Jaguar."

After leaving school John's life became a round of bricklaying by day and drumming by night. Hard manual labour gave him great strength and stamina. Bonham: "I went to work for my father in the building trade, but drumming was the only thing I was any good at and I stuck at it. When I was 16 I went full time into music with a professional group."

The pro group was Terry Webb And The Spiders, and in 1964 Bonham played on his first record, 'She's

He persevered with the sticks and listened to Dave Brubeck's Joe Morello, then amazing everyone with his finger control technique and ability to execute solos with his bare hands. All these ideas were absorbed by Bonham, albeit with a sense of impatience. Quite early on John began using a chain-driven pedal and solid wooden beater, that helped him execute his trademark bass-drum triplets. Bonham was now widely regarded as loud, dangerous and one to watch.

### THE GENESIS OF ZEPPELIN

Playing with the Crawling King Snakes, John met Robert Plant, a young blues singer from Kidderminster. It was a big step when he secured a gig backing American singer Tim Rose who had recorded a version of 'Hey Joe' before Jimi Hendrix. John and Tim played at American airbases, with Dave Pegg on bass.

Meanwhile Robert Plant had formed The Band Of Joy and Bonzo joined them in the hippie summer of 1967, wearing a bright green kaftan. When Robert's band split in May 1968, Bonham re-joined Tim Rose. During the summer, Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones began forming Led Zeppelin in London. They recruited Robert Plant who in turned recommended Bonham.

John wasn't keen. He had a good job with Tim Rose earning £40 a week. Robert eventually convinced him to attend a meeting at Jimmy Page's house and then a







rehearsal in Soho. John Paul Jones remembers that they started off playing 'Train Kept A Rolling'.

"As soon as I heard John play I knew this was going to be great," said Jones. "Here was somebody who knew what he was doing and could swing. We locked together as a team immediately. I listened to his bass drum foot and he listened to what I was doing on bass. It was one of those rhythm section marriages. He was supposed to be a loud drummer but he was musically loud. We were playing rock'n'roll and you don't want somebody tapping about. He only used a small kit but he used to play large drums. He only ever used four drums most of time and never had racks of stuff."

Jones appreciated Bonham's playing but there had to be ground rules established. When Jimmy asked Bonzo to keep the drumming simple, he seemed to ignore him. A menacing Peter Grant told him: 'Do as this man says. Behave yourself Bonham or you'll disappear. Through different doors.'

## WHEN THE BAND TRIED SOME DEMO RECORDINGS, BONHAM WAS BANNED FROM THE STUDIO AND PRONOUNCED 'UNRECORDABLE'

Led Zeppelin made their 'live' debut as the New Yardbirds in Scandinavia in September 1968 and played their first British dates in October, billed as Led Zeppelin. They signed to Atlantic and made their US debut in Denver on 26 December, 1968. Arriving in America, 21-year-old Bonham met Carmine Appice, Vanilla Fudge's drummer who was also a dab hand – or foot – at bass-drum triplets. The pair would become great pals and Carmine helped John get his first endorsement deal with Ludwig.

Meanwhile *Led Zeppelin* was released in March 1969 and caused a sensation. While the band revolved around Page's brilliant lead guitar, Plant's ecstatic vocals and John Paul Jones' Hammond organ and bass guitar virtuosity, holding it all together was Bonham's thunderous drums.

The drums complemented key tracks such as

'Babe I'm Gonna Leave You', 'Dazed And Confused', 'Communication Breakdown' and 'How Many More Times'. Bonham worked closely with Page on the strategic use of drum power, sometimes 'laying out' and not playing at all, only to return with a grand entrance. He'd improvise patterns on the cymbals, adding colour to the sound and then insert bass-drum fills on the sublime 'Good Times, Bad Times' and battering snare drum breaks on 'Dazed And Confused'.

On *Led Zeppelin II* (1969), his free-form cymbal work and cliffhanging breaks on 'Whole Lotta Love' were inspirational. The albums were bestsellers and from playing cheesy club dates in England, Zeppelin embarked on lucrative US tours. Once they earned £125 a night. Now the group was deluged with gold albums and royalties. Overnight the impoverished drummer living in a flat became a wealthy man who could buy the cars and homes he'd once dreamed about.

There was a price to pay for success. Bonham didn't

enjoy being away from home and especially didn't like flying. He had to be dragged to an airport and was often sick during a flight. He also began to suffer from stage fright. He'd get nervous listening to the roaring sound of expectant audiences from the sanctuary of his dressing room. "Christians to the lions," he'd say on his way up to the stage where he was expected to play two-hour sets and be on top form every night.

He also had to deliver his titanic feature 'Moby Dick'. It had appeared on *Led Zeppelin II* but the recorded version was a shadow of the live one. The full solo often lasted 20 minutes and involved an arduous hand-drumming routine. Bonham: "I was doing it before I joined Led Zeppelin. I remember playing a solo on 'Caravan' when I was 16." When John caught his knuckles on a cymbal or on the tom-tom tension rods then blood would flow. He broke two or three sticks a night and a

roadie would have to hurl replacements from the wings. If he didn't react quickly enough, Bonham would "roar like a bear". Sometimes the band would play a trick, hide his sticks and disappear, leaving him alone on stage, playing to the point of exhaustion. Then he'd look up and see the guys laughing, sitting in the front row and holding his missing sticks. When he'd completed his solo, Plant would take great delight in presenting him with a banana. Maybe it wasn't so surprising that the drummer and vocalist occasionally came to blows.

He tried to vary his solos every night and one of his fastest occurred when Zeppelin played at Carnegie Hall, New York in October 1969. It was where Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich had staged their famous drum battles, and as he went on stage he muttered, "I'd better be good tonight." He was.

### FOUR SYMBOLS

*Led Zeppelin III* (1970) was more acoustically orientated but 'Four Symbols' (1971) embraced such heavy-duty numbers as 'Black Dog', 'Rock And Roll', 'Four Sticks', 'Stairway To Heaven' and 'When The Levee Breaks'.

John Paul Jones says Bonham had a lot of creative input on Zeppelin albums: "He would change the whole flavour of a piece and lots of our numbers would start with a drum pattern and we'd build a riff around it. It wasn't always easy stuff either."

On 'Black Dog', a 5/8 rhythm was superimposed over the top of a four-to-the-bar pulse. The end result was one of the heaviest of all Zeppelin riffs. 'Four Sticks' was in 5/4 time and proved so difficult the band only played it live once. On the track, Bonham tried playing with four sticks to get an abstract effect and only managed to complete one take. But Jimmy Page pronounced it a success.

The album was recorded at Headley Grange, Hampshire, a former Victorian workhouse where many of the tracks were recorded with the assistance of engineer Andy Johns.

'When The Levee Breaks', a dynamic theme based on a blues by Memphis Minnie was described by Plant as "a sex groove". In order to improve the drum sound, Page and Johns came up with some suggestions. Bonham's Ludwig kit was set up in a hallway with a pair of M160 stereo microphones set up overhead. The sound was enhanced by feeding it through a guitar echo unit. The results were spectacular.

Andy Johns recalls: "The house was almost like a small hotel. It was a bit run down. Bonzo would complain, 'There's not enough frudge on the bass drum.' I knew exactly what he meant by 'frudge'. One night we took his kit out of the room where the other guys had been recording and stuck it in the hall near the stairwell. I got a couple of microphones and put them up the first set of stairs and used a Binson Echorec device that Jimmy Page had bought. Playing at that particular tempo on 'Levee' the limiters had time to breathe and that's how Bonzo got that 'Ga Gack' sound.

"I had never heard anything like it and the drum sound was quite spectacular. So I said: 'Bonzo, come and listen to this dear chap.' And he came in and said, 'Oh yeah, that's more f\*\*\*ing like it.' And everyone was very happy. Jimmy later used it on 'Kashmir'.

'When The Levee Breaks' was extensively sampled by producers in the 1990s, and *Rhythm* readers voted it 'the greatest groove of all time'.

On 'Stairway To Heaven' there is high drama when the drums come some minutes after Page and Plant's





WireImage

acoustic guitar intro and romantic vocals. Andy: "We did 'Stairway To Heaven' upstairs at Island. We tracked it with drums and acoustic guitar and John Paul was playing an upright Hohner piano. I'd never even seen one before or since. The drums come in later because it's a 'building song'. 'Rock And Roll' was a little tough to record because with the hi-hat being so open and him hitting it that hard, it was difficult to control."

Bonzo continued to come up with percussive delights throughout the '70s. He drove Zeppelin with manic fury on 'The Song Remains The Same' from *Houses Of The Holy* (1973), on the funky 'Trampled Underfoot' and hypnotic 'Kashmir' from *Physical Graffiti* (1975) and on 'Achilles Last Stand' from *Presence* (1976). His evolving style revealed fresh ideas on 'South Bound Saurez' and 'Carouselambra' from the last studio album *In Through The Outdoor* (1979).

During Zep's glory years, Bonham shared the band's highs and lows. While excessive behaviour became a problem on the road, John kept his feet on the ground at home, enjoying the life of a gentleman farmer who liked his pint of beer. As a family man, he encouraged his growing lad Jason to become a drummer and even let him play during the soundcheck at Zeppelin's final British shows at Knebworth Festival in 1979.

Behind the scenes, Bonham's stamina had begun to weaken and he confessed to colleagues he wasn't looking forward to American touring after a long absence. He just about got through a European tour but collapsed after three numbers at a show in Nuremberg in June 1980. He recovered sufficiently to continue with the rest of the German dates. The North American tour was scheduled to start in Canada in October.

Rehearsals began at Jimmy Page's home in Windsor but the worried drummer embarked on an all-day drinking session. Then on 25 September, 1980, John Henry Bonham's great heart stopped beating. He was found dead in bed by John Paul Jones. At an inquest on 8 October it was revealed that Bonham had died from

inhaling vomit in his sleep, after having consumed 40 measures of vodka during a 12-hour period. A verdict of accidental death was recorded. He was just 31 years old. His funeral took place on 10 October and tributes poured in from his fellow drummers.

His friend, Simon Kirke of Free, said: "I felt very privileged to have known Bonzo. We were each other's fans. He was my all-time favourite drummer and he was the best. No one came within a mile of Bonzo." Simon's thoughts were shared by Carmine Appice, Phil Collins, Cozy Powell and Carl Palmer. Although there was brief talk of Carmine as a possible replacement, the announcement came that ended the saga of the world's greatest rock band. Their record company Swan Song put out a statement that said: "We wish it to be known that the loss of our dear friend and the deep sense of undivided harmony felt by ourselves and our manager have led us to decide we could not continue as we were." Led Zeppelin broke up in December 1980.

### A GREAT LEGACY

It was a tragic end to John's life and career and it seemed like the end of a great era in rock history. Page, Plant and Jones were devastated. It took time for them to rebuild their confidence and individual careers. But the past was always present and Led Zeppelin would reunite for various special events including Live Aid, mostly with different drummers. But they were at their best when Jason Bonham was at the helm, carrying on his father's tradition with flair and dedication. And so it was a historic moment when Jason and the Led Zeppelin he'd grown up listening to as a kid performed together at the O2 Arena, London on 10 December, 2007. The memory of his father's contribution to drumming remained as strong as ever. Around the world new waves of heavy metal groups built their sound and style on Zeppelin while Bonzo's drumming work remains a strong influence on modern day musicians and producers.

But it was his contemporaries who understood him best. Ian Paice of Deep Purple proclaimed: "He was a wonderful player. Zeppelin's music allowed him to create this monster sound and play in a gloriously simplified fashion. Regardless of how well Jimmy Page recorded the drums, that sound was in him. Bonham influenced most metal players today and people are still trying to recreate that sound. He had immense power and menace. He also knew exactly when a song needed a lift, when to stop playing and when to start thrashing. Pure magic."

Bev Bevan (The Move, ELO) said: "He was such a brilliant but simple drummer. A lot of drummers can't wait to fill in a gap with the cleverest things they can play. John would leave it out. Some of his greatest stuff with Led Zeppelin was when he left a pregnant pause. Then he'd steam back in. Despite his wild image, it was his self-control as a drummer that made him great."

Carmine Appice from Vanilla Fudge said: "I loved Bonzo. He was a beautiful man and a fantastic drummer. He was a really respectful guy and always treated me with courtesy. When I first heard his bass drum triplet on 'Good Times, Bad Times' I was blown away. When we met, I told him I loved that foot thing and he said, 'I got that from you!'" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Led Zeppelin

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Led Zeppelin *Led Zeppelin* (1969), Led Zeppelin *II* (1969), Led Zeppelin *III* (1970), Led Zeppelin *IV* (1971), Led Zeppelin *Houses Of The Holy* (1973), Led Zeppelin *Physical Graffiti* (1975), Led Zeppelin *In Through The Outdoor* (1979)



# Joe Morello

The man behind the solo in classic odd-time jazz hit 'Take Five' has influenced generations of drummers from jazz to rock both as a musician and a gifted drum educator

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

In 1961 Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five' became the first jazz single to sell over a million. Even more remarkable, 'Take Five' is in 5/4 time and climaxes with a drum solo. The drummer was Joe Morello, a man of immense musicality and technical finesse. Pianist Dave Brubeck's quartet married classical melodicism and odd time signatures with cool chamber jazz improvisation. Like Buddy Rich, Joe inspired rock drummers as much as jazzers, most tellingly that special British generation who would soon invent prog rock. They related to Joe's slamming 22" Ludwig bass drum, fat toms and pin-sharp SuperSensitive snare as much as to his innovative rhythms. Anyone who's not heard Brubeck's live *At Carnegie Hall* (1963) should order it today. On Joe's spectacular solo, 'Castilian Drums', you will recognise the hand drumming licks that John Bonham later used in his 'Moby Dick' solos.

Born in Massachusetts in 1928, Joe abandoned a promising career as a classical violinist when he turned to drumming at 15. His classical sense of touch, form, dynamics and subtlety informed all his drumming. Think Max Roach with Buddy's chops. Arriving in New York he was head-hunted by Brubeck in 1956, elevating the quartet to massive worldwide popularity over the next decade. *Rhythm* met the great man in 2010.

## Joe, is it true you were initially reluctant to join the Brubeck Quartet?

"I'd seen them at Birdland and you'd just see Dave and Paul [Desmond, alto sax] with two spotlights. I said, 'I don't want to sit in the dark.' I was friends with Joe Dodge, the previous drummer, and he said, 'I haven't played a four-bar break in three years, Paul just wants me to play railroad tracks... straight!' I said, 'Good grief, these two clowns were expressing themselves and they got these two guys in the dark.' Dave said, 'I'll put your name on the marquee.' The opening night Dave says, 'Do you want to place a little drum thing?' I said, 'Sure.' Now the place goes crazy and Desmond and [bassist] Norman Bates stamp off the bandstand. So Dave went backstage and said, 'What did you guys leave for?' 'We left because people were standing up and applauding the damn drum solo.' Paul said, 'Either Morello goes or I go.' So Dave said, 'Morello is not going...'"

## Dave obviously recognised you were the next step in the band's evolution?

"That's what Dave told me, we needed a stronger drummer. I said to Paul, 'It's not my fault if people clap, I'm just playing.' He was so jealous. Every time I did a drum thing and got a standing ovation he just couldn't deal with it. He was the big star in the quartet, he didn't really speak to me for two months!"

## In the end Paul wrote 'Take Five' for you and you became friends, didn't you?

"It's true, towards the end. There was nothing he could do. I started to win all the polls. I never expected that, I

never even thought about it. The *Playboy* poll and *Downbeat*, and even in your country, the *Melody Maker*. 'Take Five' sold quite well, about five million copies. It did a lot for the group."

## Where did the 5/4 groove come from?

"It came from me. When Dave approached me he said, 'Do you think jazz can be played in any other tempo?' I said, 'Sure, why not?' And so Desmond came up with this tune. Dave wasn't used to playing that tempo, he just had vamps. It wasn't too long that he got right into it though and started to improvise over it. And the drum solo was really out, I just felt like doing that. It doesn't have any obvious form, although there is a form. I just move it all around, that's what made it interesting."

## At the time, playing jazz in fives, sevens and nines, etc was seriously radical.

"I'd done it at home in Springfield. I used to play things in 5/4 and 7/4 on my own. We had sessions and I'd say, 'Let's do this in sevens.' That would be a bar of four and a bar of three. You played in 3/4, 4/4 and then five was for cheese! Off balance. People thought I was nuts. They'd say, 'What do you want to do that for?' I said, 'Because it's different.' In classical music it's been done, so why not in jazz?"

## You grew up playing classical music...

"Yeah, playing violin, and my family thought I was going to be the next [violinist Jascha] Heifetz. I could play, but I just fell in love with the drums. I found good teachers. I studied with Joe Sefcik for about three years then went to Mr [George Lawrence] Stone in Boston, another great percussionist. I was very fortunate. And then Billy Gladstone, at Radio City Music Hall."

## Gladstone has an almost mythical reputation.

"He was very, very good. I studied with him for quite a while. He'd say, 'You really want this, don't you?' I said, 'Yes, because I love the sound you're getting, the relaxation.' That was his whole thing. He could get a good sound on the drum, not like he was slamming. The drummers I studied with were all very good players, the techniques they were showing were good. They didn't play jazz, I could do my own thing, but I wanted to know how the instrument worked. That's why I studied with classical people. Over the years I developed this kind of finger control thing with the left and right hand and that is how I could get more speed, with the fingers closer to the drum."

## On 'Castilian Drums' you rub your thumb across the snare batter, like a conguero.

"The inspiration came basically from the Indian things, with the fingers and the edges of the drums. I saw a lot of tabla players. The musicians sat there, nobody would play until the drummer arrived, everybody was bowing

to this guy. We deliberately wanted to see music that was so different from our things, you know?"

## You also did some legendary clinics in Britain.

"We travelled all over the world. We would play the Royal Festival Hall, and all through England and Scotland. I loved your country, the people were great, I had such good times, I loved those old railway hotels. You have some good drummers. Ronnie Verrell. Phil Seamen was a legend, a character, a very good drummer. When we were doing the clinics, Ivor Arbiter said to me one time, 'A drummer friend wants to know if you could play together,' and I said, 'Certainly, why not?' That was Kenny Clare and he was a real nice human being and a great drummer. He used to come here with vocalists Cleo Laine and Tony Bennett. We would hang out till four in the morning drinking beers."

## You met some of the rock guys too?

"Ringo came one time to see us and said hello and we exchanged some sticks. He made that group sound great, he did what he had to do and he did it well. He sure made a lot of noise, his groove was incredible. Everybody does their own thing and he had some good rhythm concepts, you could tell right away."

## You and Buddy Rich touched rock drummers just as much as jazz drummers.

"Buddy became a dear friend and we were going to do something together. I'd see him at the Blue Note and between sets he'd go sit in the bus. He said, 'How would you like to do a thing with my band like Louie [Bellson] does?' I said, 'I'd love it, but that would be the best lesson I ever had!' He said, 'Oh come on!' I saw him once or twice after, but then he got sick and was in hospital."

## Both you and Buddy achieved phenomenal left hand speed and control.

"I try to relax, not get tight. People say, 'It looks like you're doing nothing, you make it look so easy.' I say, 'Of course it is, I wouldn't be able to do it if it was difficult!' Some drummers overdo everything for show, I never really got into that. Krupa was good at twirling sticks. I said, 'Gene, I tried your thing, I threw 'em up and they never came back!'" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Dave Brubeck Quartet

### CLASSIC CUTS:

The Dave Brubeck

Quartet *Time Out* (1959),

The Dave Brubeck Quartet *Time Further Out* (1961), Joe Morello *Drum Method 1 and 2* (DVD, 2006)





# Travis Barker

From Blink-182 via Box Car Racer and The Transplants to his star-studded, hip-hop heavy solo album, Travis Barker is the hardest working drummer in the business

WORDS: CHUCK PARKER

**T**ravis Barker is a drummer on a mission, and that mission is to move you and make you feel. He's accomplishing this by being involved in an incredible amount of projects of varying styles and worlds. He's a producer. He's a remixer. He's a clothing designer (Famous Stars And Straps). He juggles all these things by adhering to a vigorous work ethic and maintaining a razor-sharp focus on whatever his current project is. When *Rhythm* last caught up with him, his focal point was his solo album, 2010's *Can The Drummer Get Some*, which Travis was working on in his private studio. *Rhythm* had the chance to visit this creative oasis, located in North Hollywood, for a one-on-one interview with the hardest working drummer in the industry. We found that regardless of who he's playing with, or what track he's remixing, in the centre of it all, he's a drummer.

## When did the idea first hit you about doing your own solo album?

"About two years ago. My remixes were getting a little buzz, somebody mentioned the idea. I was doing a lot of production at the time. Then, next thing you know, I'm at Interscope meeting with Jimmy Iovine. He wanted it. At first it was just going to be a remix album, then it turned into what it is now, all originals. Maybe a couple of remixes. I actually started on it before the accident [*Travis was injured in a plane crash in 2008*]."

## What was the inspiration for the material on the album?

"Sometimes it was: 'I love this MC because of this. I love Beanie Sigel because of this. Or, 'This song off his album made me feel a certain way, so I want this record to feel like that. I want to hear Wayne on this track because I've never heard him on a beat like that and he's not usually ever featured on a beat like that.' I put people left of what they're normally used to. Not to the point where people were going, 'Oh, he doesn't sound good on that,' but, 'Whoa, it's cool to hear him on a track like that.' Or the pairing. On one song there's Swizz Beatz, Game, Lil' Wayne and Rick Ross. All on one song. Or the Rizzo, Raekwon and Tom Morello track. Rage and Wu Tang used to tour together back in the day, so it's cool having this stuff on there."

## Have you ever experimented with vintage recording gear?

"Yeah. I've recorded Blink records, Box Car Racer records, Aquabats records, a lot of albums to tape. But the way my album is, there's just so much crazy instrumentation and stacking of drums and stacking of everything else, it would have been really time-consuming recording to tape."

## Do you mix up beats first on the computer or do you sit down at the kit?

"It depends. A lot of my album is my new cocktail kit. It

may have been something I felt on the MPC. I just did a 10,000 mile bus ride from Miami, so I'll just bring a mini studio and sit there and write on the MPC and have everything from horns to synths to live drums, guitars, vocals and I'll just write for hours and hours. Then I get home and a beat may evolve from me playing a cocktail kit on it or me playing my drum kit or electronic pad. I exclusively use Roland but I've collected a bunch of vintage stuff for this album just so I could use old synth sounds and old electronic drum sounds. On the cocktail kit I have this little gogo station. It has the agogo bell, jam block, cowbell. I have my marching snare off to the left. I have everything on there. I can't wait for a situation where I can play that live."

## Did you use any experimental or unorthodox recording methods?

"Yeah! There's been lots of cool things. I've recorded my '63 Impala's trunk! That sounds amazing! It's like a skip for this song I have called 'Jump Down' with The Cool Kids. We've also recorded drums with just one mic - like old school. One room mic. We recorded loads of marching drums, quints, live hand claps."

## How has that whole marching band element from your life impacted on your playing?

"I love that stuff! It still comes out in my playing. When I'm on tour and I don't have a lot to do except be around my drums, I sit on a practice pad and I'll play for two hours before we go on."

## Do you still do a lot of traditional grip?

"Yeah. I have to stop myself, 'cos I'll warm up like that, traditional, and I'll be like, 'That's not even how you're going to be playing.' I don't even think there is a correct way to warm up for the way I play!"

## How has having your own studio helped you with the recording?

"I couldn't imagine it any other way, you know? A couple of years ago, I didn't have a studio and I would just come home from touring and I wouldn't play drums. I would get heavy into cars. I didn't have kids then. I would do something completely different. I would come home from long tours and just want to do something else. Then, something snapped a couple of years ago and I wanted to be here at the studio any chance that I get. Like I said, there's always something going on here. I'm doing the soundtrack to our skate video from Stars And Straps that comes out later this year, right around the same time my album drops. So that's going on. Between that and my album, and finishing up the Paul Wall album, it's crazy!"

## What is your approach to playing hip-hop?

"I do whatever they're doing. I have to hop to different situations all the time and I'll do whatever, you know? A lot of times I'm playing to a backing track. When we did

the Grammys, it was a backing track. They would switch tempos and stuff, but you just felt the tempo change and it was easy. I love a click. With Blink, we're always to a click. I love, *love* playing to a click. For the Mary J thing we just did [*performing 'Stairway To Heaven' on American Idol with Mary J Blige, Steve Vai, Orianthi and Randy Jackson*], it was no click and it was completely live, so it always changes."

## Do you try and nail the click and play right on top of the beat?

"I don't even hear the click. That is my goal. I feel comfortable with it. The click was like a demon when you were a kid. When you're a kid you're like, 'Aww, man, I don't wanna play to a click.' It was hard and it was tough at times. Now, you get to the point where you feel more comfortable with it, you know?"

## How did teaching and giving lessons affect or influence your own playing, and do you still find time to practise?

"I wanted to find myself playing more when I was home and I wanted to work with kids. Just be interactive and keep drumming. I try to be here [*in the studio*] and practise because I'm recording all the time. So, if I'm here I walk around with sticks in my hand. I'm doing something. I'm either tossing them or I'm playing on something, just being productive."

## Is there a particular area of your playing that you want to develop?

"I get to a place on tour where I can do it and then when I'm home I'm more in a creative environment and it's more making music instead of playing music or practising. So, when I'm on tour, I like to be in the mind frame where anything I think of in my head while I'm playing I can pull off. I'm not like, 'Oh s\*\*t, I'm going to try this for the first time tonight and I don't know how it's going to work out.' I change my fills every night. I improvise. But I'm not going to confuse [*Blink-182 bandmates*] Mark or Tom or throw anyone off. I just try to get to a place where I can pull off whatever idea I have in my head. I think that's the win-win. That's the ultimate goal, to be able to pull off what you want to play without really thinking about it." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Blink-182, Box Car Racer,  
Transplants, +44

**CLASSIC CUTS:**

Blink-182 *Enema Of The*

*State* (1999), Blink-182 *Blink-182* (2003),  
Transplants *Transplants* (2002), Travis Barker  
*Give The Drummer Some* (2010)







# Jeff Porcaro

Prior to his untimely death in 1992, Jeff Porcaro worked with Michael Jackson, Steely Dan and his own band Toto. *Rhythm* met the session ace in 1988

WORDS: TIM SMITH

Session legend Jeff Porcaro never had visions of being the world's greatest drummer. He didn't believe in putting that kind of pressure on himself. And even though drums have shaped and moulded virtually every facet of his life, he's never been controlled by them. Porcaro knows where he's at as a drummer. Okay, he plays in an internationally acclaimed band (Toto), but as far as he's concerned that doesn't entitle him to the adulation he's given. To Jeff, such laurels are for the truly dedicated: the Gadd, the Bellson, the Hakims, the Williamses. It's not that he doesn't believe in himself, he just has a certain perspective on where his career has taken him, and why. His respect for his peers accounts for all that he's learned. His strongest convictions are for integrity in music and for love of his family.

## Tell us about new album *The Seventh One*.

"There's a rawness that wasn't present in the last couple of albums. It feels like what our first or second records felt like. When we made the first album we decided that it wasn't going to be an r'n'b, rock or fusion album. We love all kinds of music - Hendrix, The Beatles, Chick Corea. It should be a melting pot of all our influences. We wanted to be an international band and we wanted to be on the radio, so we figured we had to do commercial music for people to hear us. Then, after a while, they'll follow you if you stretch out into different musical directions and appreciate some extensive playing. It's tough, though, trying to get 'Wonder Bread' America to be into grooves - let alone really understand some nice musical things."

"For every tune it was something new and different. [Most tracks] were done at The Complex. These rooms weren't meant to be recording studios; they're huge film sound stages. We located the drums in every part of the room, depending on how live we wanted the sound. [Producer George] Massenburg would have these plastic acrylic sheets that he would bend into parabolic reflectors. On the tune 'Mushanga' he'd lower these down so that, because I'm playing the rims of the toms, the mics would pick up the tightness of the rim pattern, as the sound was reflecting a shorter distance. Room or overhead mics would pick up the resonance and ambience from the room and the toms themselves."

"I used my standard Pearl maple kit. No power toms - 10", 12", 13", 14" and a 16" floor. My bass drum is oversized - 22"x18". With snares, I used a variety. An old Ludwig Black Beauty, a Pearl Piccolo, a Ludwig chrome and a custom Valley Drum Piccolo. The choice of snare changed with the texture and style of each tune. When we record, there are never any real rules. If there's a new drum or mic or effect or whatever, we'll try it."

## How do you react to the engineer who has difficulty recording your sound?

"I've been fortunate that nobody's ever messed with my drums too much. People have their own ideas of

what sounds good. A lot of engineers are set in their ways in how they can get a sound. It's a lot easier for them, 'cos time is money in the studio, when that producer or artist has a particular sound preference. Now, with the advent of samplers and machines, a lot of them won't even care what the acoustic kit sounds like because later on they can re-trigger.

"I basically keep my drums wide open. I think most engineers are in agreement with that. I take a 1"x1" piece of gaffa tape and roll it, making a tube, and put one on the edge of each drum. Also, I bring a lot of snares. Engineers and producers will have their own too. They'll say, 'This is my snare. I've used it on all my records.' That's what they are comfortable with. Sometimes you can't justify why they insist on certain things, but you have to flow with it. Hopefully, it's guys like Al Schmidt, George Massenburg or Greg Ladanyi. You do a date with these kind of producers and never do a drum check! You run the tune down a few times for rehearsal and by the time you're ready for take one, your drums sound fantastic! They figure you're a musician and you're out there with other musicians, your drums must be tuned the way you think they're good for the tune. If it calls for a high-pitched, ringy snare and a deep, rich, punchy bass drum, it's my job to catch that sound."

## You have been through some pretty trying times with nerves and insecurity.

"I always have insecurities about my hands cramping up. They used to a lot. All my fingers would cramp and shut tight. You couldn't pry them apart. When I went on the road with Steely Dan, I went nuts! Toward the end of the show my hands would be twitching. I sweat heavy so I'd hold the sticks too tight, then I'd cramp. I shaved the lacquer off my sticks, and that helped. I have small hands and they hurt after I play because I hit so hard. It's just something in my heart; it feels better to play hard and really kick it out."

"I'm always really nervous before going onstage. On the last tour, I finally found my groove. After every show, I soak my arms in a big bucket of ice water. It kills me at first, but then it feels great. It's the same thing baseball pitchers do. The swelling goes down. The next day I wouldn't be tight or my bones wouldn't ache. Also, for the last four years I've had sticks made where they just dip the tip and the shoulder taper in lacquer only. Nothing slips out of my hands now."

## You have a great influence on other players.

"I find it very hard to accept that, to this day. I guess in about the last three years it's been a responsibility to me. We all have our heroes that we set as our standard of what we strive for and deem as high-level playing. I don't see myself as anywhere near the people I admire. When somebody tells me they admire me or I see a kid with a poster of me in their room, I feel like saying, 'Have you heard Jim Keltner or Bernard Purdie? You

should be checking these guys out first.' But people say, 'But Jeff, your time feel and the music...' Well, I'm talking about that stuff too."

"It's the old adage about being in the right place at the right time. I've been real lucky. I can give you a rundown: dates, what happened, who got sick. I left high school with Sonny and Cher. When I came to LA to do the TV show, there were guys like Tom Scott and Pete Christlieb in the band. They heard me and were kind enough to recommend me for other dates. I can't tell you how many others are left behind. It's the law of supply and demand. I went through a lot of years of unbelievable guilt as far as how successful I would get in the studio. And I feel I was only successful because of experience, not because I was some drumming phenomenon. How you play with 'phones, with a click, with a rhythm section is all experience. Reading, too. I can't read s\*\*t. If I scuffle, I say to myself, 'Okay, just play time through this, listen to what the guitar player or bassist play and nail it the second time.'

"I'd love to be more of an all-round drummer. I'd love to be able to do stuff like Bozzio, Colaiuta, Weckl, Sonny Emory. It frustrates me, 'cos in my mind I hear everything and want to go to them while I'm playing, but the motor skills and mechanicals just aren't up to it. I don't really know in my heart if I was ever a drummer like that. I'll tell you what I dig. In the Sting movie, *Bring On The Night*, Omar Hakim taking off on that tune. That's nice; real musical. Like Tony Williams, Jack DeJohnette. That's being real free and comfortable. I don't take my drums seriously, and they do."

## You have to take it seriously to a point.

"Okay, to a point. When I see a lot of press, though, about Tony and Omar, I say, 'Right on.' These are dedicated musicians for their instrument. I'm not putting myself down, but I think adulation should go to guys like that. Imagine... you're practising every day, getting your chops up, playing some deep s\*\*t and suddenly this punk, Jeff Porcaro, is picking up a Grammy - in the painted, tainted showbiz world, there's some jive-ness to me. These guys should have what I have; admiration, money or whatever, in respect for those true pioneers - their records should be heard by everybody, every day. Tony Williams, John Coltrane and Miles Davis should all be household names." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Sonny & Cher, Toto, Michael Jackson

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Toto *Toto IV* (1982), Michael Jackson *Thriller* (1982), Steely Dan *Katy Lied* (1975), Madonna *Like A Prayer* (1989)



# Cozy Powell

Cozy Powell was a hard-working and fast-living drum hero who occupied the stool for much of hard rock's royalty and even had a drum-feature solo hit

WORDS: DAVID WEST

Cozy Powell blazed through life like a comet, firing up every band he played with before moving on through the rock firmament, leaving a glittering trail in his wake. Although he died tragically in a car crash in 1998 he remains one of rock's most influential drummers, whose history intertwines with many of the biggest bands of his generation, if not of all time. He is one of just a handful of drummers to have had their own hit singles, and his distinctive sound – huge and powerful but always warm and musical – is instantly recognisable.

Born in Cirencester, Colin Powell (born Flocks) took his nickname from the great jazz drummer Cozy Cole, who played with Cab Calloway and Benny Carter. Cole scored a hit record of his own, with the instrumental track 'Topsy' in 1958. It was an auspicious name but one that would take a lot to live up to. Powell didn't let his namesake down. He started playing the drums in the school ensemble at the age of 12, but was kicked out for being too loud. Undeterred, he was soon gigging three or four nights a week with local bands. The late nights meant Cozy was invariably tardy for school and he was politely but firmly asked to leave. He got a job just long enough to buy his first kit, then packed his bags and headed to Germany where, despite being only 16, he found work playing the club circuit with a band called The Sorcerers. It was a hard grind, performing for hours every night and sleeping four to a room, but it gave him the chance to sharpen his chops and learn his craft.

In 1968, after three years of slogging around German nightclubs, Powell returned to his native soil and kept busy playing in a series of groups, often with other members of The Sorcerers. After performing with Tony Joe White at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival, Cozy was offered the drum stool in the Jeff Beck Group, a highly coveted spot that raised his profile considerably. They cut two albums, *Rough And Ready* and *The Jeff Beck Group*, before Beck broke up the band.

Powell turned to doing session work for producer Mickie Most's RAK Records label. After playing on numerous tracks for artists including Hot Chocolate and Donovan, Most convinced Powell to record a single showcasing his prodigious drumming, the result of which saw Cozy's solo debut 'Dance With The Devil' get all the way up to Number Three in the UK singles chart. Powell's appearance on *Top Of The Pops* made him a household name, and he released two follow-up singles, 'The Man In Black', (Number 18 in May 1974), and 'Na Na Na' (Number 10 in August 1974).

## OVER THE RAINBOW

In 1975 Powell took a break from the drums to spend several months indulging his other great passion, motor racing, competing on the British circuit before accepting an offer to join Ritchie Blackmore's post-Deep Purple band, Rainbow. Cozy's first recording with the group, *Rising*, reached Number Six in the UK album

charts and still resonates with modern drummers.

In Rainbow, Powell developed his trademark live solo, performed to the accompaniment of the '1812 Overture' and all the pyrotechnics that health and safety would allow. He played on three more Rainbow albums – *On Stage*, *Long Live Rock'n'Roll* and *Down To Earth*, which included the hit single 'Since You've Been Gone' – and in 1979 Cozy released his first album as a solo artist, *Over The Top*, featuring Cream's Jack Bruce on bass and Gary Moore on guitar. Tracks like the aptly titled 'Killer' showed Powell in full flow, battering his tom toms over a double bass drum groove. Powell left Rainbow and joined the Michael Schenker Group, where he stayed for two years before joining Whitesnake, with whom he recorded 'Slide It In'.

"I'm a huge fan of Cozy Powell, as a human being and as a drummer," says Tommy Aldridge, who, like Powell, was a pioneer of double bass drumming in rock. "Cozy was one of the few drummers, one of my few contemporaries, that I actually considered a friend. When I was working with Ozzy and we were supporting Whitesnake in Europe I got to know Cozy, and got to hang out with him." Tommy later took over the drum stool in Whitesnake and found himself playing the songs he'd heard Powell perform when they were on the road together. "To have the opportunity to play some of those tunes that I heard him play, the real deal, night after night, was a real blessing."

## BOMBS AWAY

After the success of *Over The Top*, Powell released two more solo records, 1981's *Tilt* and 1983's *Octopus*. The latter featured a new incarnation of Powell's solo in which he let rip over the rousing score from the movie *633 Squadron*, a wartime adventure about an RAF squadron assigned to take out a Nazi rocket fuel factory. Cozy's bombastic solo moved up a gear again when he became one third of Emerson, Lake and Powell. Their one album (released in 1986) and accompanying tour featured an arrangement of Gustav Holst's 'Mars, The Bringer Of War', which gave Cozy room to cut loose, surrounded by more fireworks than a Guy Fawkes celebration. The late '80s saw Powell return to session work, playing on Warlock's *Triumph And Agony* with songstress Doro Pesch, Cinderella's *Long Cold Winter* and Gary Moore's *After The War*. Despite the fact that Moore and Cozy had worked together on Cozy's solo material, their collaboration was not a happy one. Moore's previous record, *Wild Frontier*, featured drum machines, which were anathema to Powell and, when they began rehearsals for a tour, Powell had to explain to Moore that some of the parts on *Wild Frontier* could not be replicated by a human being. He left before Moore hit both the road and the roof.

Adding another legendary band to his resume, Cozy joined Black Sabbath, co-producing *Headless Cross* with Tony Iommi. Back in a band again after several years as

a hired hand, Powell told *Metal Hammer* magazine:

"People say I keep moving around; I move around session-wise, but then again, I think a lot of drummers do. It's great to be part of a band; had the Gary Moore tour happened, it just would have been, 'Do this, do that,' and there's not a lot of satisfaction in doing that after a while. I don't mind doing it in the studio, but on stage you have to be able to play the way you feel best. If every drum fill has to be the same every night, there's no fun in that for me."

## SIDELINED FROM SABBATH

Sadly, Powell's involvement with Sabbath was interrupted in 1991 when he was injured while horse riding. With Ronnie James Dio back in the fold, Sabbath brought Vinny Appice in to record *Dehumanizer*, leaving a disgruntled Cozy on the sidelines.

"I was kicked out of the band because a horse fell on top of me and I couldn't play for six months," he said. "I was disappointed in Tony's choices, and especially because he didn't want to wait for me to recover."

Like Powell, Appice would be in and out of the band's ever-changing line-up for years to come. When he returned as part of Heaven And Hell, Appice paid tribute to Powell: "On those tracks that are on the CD *The Dio Years*, I used Cozy Powell's drums," explains Appice. "I thought that was cool. Cozy and Tony were mates and I said, 'Great!' I tuned them up a little bit, played them a little bit and started recording. I kept his spirit alive on the recording."

After leaving Sabbath for the second time in 1996, Powell played on three albums with Brian May, as well records with Peter Green, Yngwie Malmsteen and Judas Priest's Glenn Tipton.

On 5 April, 1998, Powell was driving on the M4 in the rain, talking to his girlfriend on his mobile phone. His black Saab 9000 Turbo suffered a puncture while Powell was doing 104 mph and spun out of control. Powell was killed in the crash, falling victim to his love of speed and ending the career of one of rock's most charismatic figures. Gone, but never forgotten, Cozy continues to inspire drummers as he did John Tempesta during the recording of the track 'Meat' for Tony Iommi's solo record. "There's one fill that's a triplet fill," says Tempesta. "It's pretty much a tribute to Cozy, very similar to his style. Tony Iommi turned around and smiled. He loved that!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Cozy Powell, Rainbow, Black Sabbath, Jeff Beck

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Rainbow *Rising* (1976), Cozy Powell

*Over The Top* (1979)





# Tony Williams

A true original and a drumming innovator, Tony Williams was part of Miles Davis' 'second great quintet' as a teenager and went on to pre-empt jazz fusion with his Lifetime bands

WORDS: RONAN MCDONALD/RHYTHM

**T**ony Williams was one of the last great jazz drummers, whose career began at the tender age of 17 when Miles Davis picked him to play in his band. After five years with Davis – during which time he played on great albums such as *E.S.P.* alongside Davis, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock and Ron Carter – Williams went on to form his own Lifetime band, whose innovative fusion of heavy rock and jazz was ahead of its time.

Tony Williams tragically passed away in 1997, aged just 51, but to this day remains massively influential, a true drumming legend, unique both as a performer and composer. The following interview appeared in *Rhythm* in 1990.

## IMITATING ART

The fact that Tony Williams is frequently cited as the most imitated drummer of all time says it all; while he may not have written the book, he certainly contributed an important chapter. In fact, how could he fail to be so influential? Having played from the age of 17 with the tirelessly creative Miles Davis and recorded countless albums as a musician and then as a leader, his experience is unquestionable and his talent legendary.

"I grew up in Boston and I listened to the music of my parents and then my friends. This was before rock'n'roll and we were listening to people like The Oreos and The Clovers, that sort of sound. They used to call them Bird groups. Anyway, my dad played saxophone as a hobby. At weekends he'd play parties, dances and weddings which he would take me along to. I always watched the drummers in these bands and said to myself, 'Well, if they can do it, I know I can do it.' So in the summer of '54 [the band] took a break and I said, 'Dad, can I sit in?' He said, 'Yes, what instrument do you want to play?' And I said, 'I want to play drums,' and he said, 'Sure, let's do it.' So I've been playing since I was eight."

Like most musicians, Tony started out imitating his favourite players; people like Max Roach, Art Blakey, Philly Joe Jones, Roy Haynes and Jimmy Cobb – the great drummers of the day. Although it's sometimes said that imitation can lead to a lack of personal style, for Tony imitation remains a necessary part of the progression towards individuality.

"Basically I was very much interested in playing just like them, playing as much of what they had to offer as possible. I was eager to assimilate. It's hard to say when I started to develop my own style – it was through happenstance that that happened, it wasn't something that I consciously pursued. A lot of drummers think that as soon as they start playing they have to sound like themselves without realising that they don't yet have a self. I think it's more important to pick individual drummers from the past and try to play like them. My dearest desire was to play like Max Roach or to play like Art Blakey, and because of that I learned

what the drums can do and what they have done in the past. It's like learning a vocabulary, if you want to learn how to speak French the way you want to, you have to learn to speak French the correct way by learning all of the idiomatic phrases and all the proper grammar, then you can start to express yourself. People seem to have a very low opinion of the drums – even drummers – and as part of the way through which they express this low opinion is by thinking that they are more important than the instrument, by thinking that they can sound like themselves when they don't even know how to play the drums yet. So I started out for years just wanting to play like Philly Joe Jones or Roy Haynes, and I think they way I started to sound like myself was by learning all the great things that they played, and then making a kind of mental Rolodex or graph of what each drummer *didn't* do. In those places, in those gaps in the graph, I found what they didn't do, and started to fill in the spaces they had left with my own playing."

## FIVE YEARS WITH MILES

Of course, the gig to which Tony Williams owes the bulk of his success was his five-year stint with Miles Davis; a daunting task for anyone, but one that Tony took on at the tender age of 17. I asked him how much public exposure he'd had up to that point.

"The first time I played the drums was in front of an audience, so the biggest plus in my early development was that I was immediately playing for people and with people. It wasn't a matter of just practising at home until I was ready. I was working in Boston and I'd got a job at a club in the rhythm section. They would import horn players from New York each week, so one week Jackie McLean, the alto-sax player, came to Boston and played with us. He liked the way I played and asked me to come back to New York with him. I worked with Jackie until the early part of '63. I think it was in April of '63 that we played a concert somewhere in midtown Manhattan and Miles Davis came to the show. He liked what he heard and called me about a month later from California to ask me if I would join his band – I didn't believe it but he called and *asked*."

So, we ask Tony, what was Miles like to work with?

"He was great. I found him... mixed. He's a very strong person, a very strong man, he has a very dynamic personality. I'm privileged and honoured to have spent those years of my life with him – they were good formative years."

Miles Davis was a huge name to play with at an early age – was that intimidating for Tony at the time?

"Before I met Miles he was my idol. I was always interested in and affected by music, and Miles Davis' sound was, and still is, very unique. His music touched me very deeply. By the time I got to work with Miles I felt that it was something I was supposed to be doing, so my attitude changed a bit, I felt the best prepared for the job. Looking back on it I think, 'Wow, what did I

do? That was really something that I got into.' But at the time I thought it was quite natural."

## TWICE IN A LIFETIME

Tony's first project after leaving Miles' band was an album called *Lifetime*, released on Blue Note. How did it feel to be leading a band for the first time?

"It wasn't the first time, I had led bands in Boston and this wasn't really *leading* a band as such, it was just making a record on which all the songs were written by me. Having to do that I guess built up a sort of manner about myself, a sort of safety valve that helped me through that time."

In 1969 Tony formed the Lifetime Band with Larry Young, John McLaughlin and eventually Jack Bruce. That lasted until 1971 when Tony decided to take a break. In 1974 a new Lifetime Band was formed with Allan Holdsworth, Alan Pasqua and Tony Newton. After that Tony took another break from playing to pursue composition, studying at the University of California and returned to making records for Blue Note in 1985, releasing a string of albums in the late '80s such as *Foreign Intrigue*, *Civilisation*, *Angel Street* and *Native Heart*.

Asked what he feels makes a great drummer, Tony replied: "I love the drums and I want the drums to always sound good, and the way a person solos or his technical ability is not the mark of a good drummer. The mark of a good drummer is how well you accompany people in all situations. For me a good drummer is a drummer who can read, who can play in a Country and Western band, who can play in a big band, who can play behind a singer like Tony Bennett, who can play brushes, who can play Latin music or who can play whatever they're asked to play. Solos are a very small part of a drummer's arsenal."

"I've come a long way since the early days," he concludes, "and I've worked with a lot of wonderful people. Throughout that time I've developed in so many ways, as a person and as a musician, but all the time the main thing I've worked to get across in my music has been, quite simply, a love for the drums – I've always put the drums first. If I could go back in time I wouldn't change a thing." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Miles Davis, The Tony Williams Lifetime, The New Tony Williams Lifetime

### CLASSIC CUTS: Miles

Davis *My Funny Valentine* (1964), Miles Davis *E.S.P.* (1965), Tony Williams *Lifetime* (1964), The Tony Williams Lifetime *Emergency* (1969), Tony Williams *Tokyo Live* (1995)







# Jimmy Chamberlin

He brought jazz complexity to alt-rock drumming with the Smashing Pumpkins and influenced generations of rock drummers in the process

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**F**ew drummers in the alt-rock genre garner such praise and admiration as Jimmy Chamberlin. Possessed of power when required but also complexity and musicality – he trained as a jazz drummer – Jimmy’s drumming with Smashing Pumpkins on classic albums such as *Gish*, *Siamese Dream* and *Mellon Collie And The Infinite Sadness* has influenced a generation of drummers since to put chops into their rock. With his own bands The Jimmy Chamberlin Complex and currently Skysaw, Jimmy continues to push drumming boundaries.

Smashing Pumpkins had disbanded in 2000 but reformed five years later with Jimmy back behind the kit. An album, *Zeitgeist*, was released in 2007. *Rhythm* spoke to Jimmy during the recording sessions for their acoustic *American Gothic* EP, shortly before he left the band again in 2009.

## How did you find the replacements for former Pumpkins James Iha [guitar] and D’arcy [bass]?

“When we were doing *Zeitgeist* in Los Angeles, I started holding auditions while Billy was doing the overdubs. I didn’t put any ads in the paper; just through word of mouth I put the word out that we were going to put a touring band together and we were looking for players, and let the universe take over from there. It’s the same thing I did in the Complex. The thing you can always count on in art and music is that when you put a vibration or an idea out to the universe, it usually reciprocates. Sure enough the right people were the third or fourth people that I auditioned.”

## The album was recorded by just you and Billy?

“That’s pretty much the way we recorded throughout the history of the Pumpkins. The other two members never really did much recording, for whatever reason. It’s kind of the way we’ve always worked.”

## What sort of instruments are you bringing into the sound for the acoustic EP?

“We use a little bit of harpsichord, piano, acoustic guitars, a small drum kit with the drums de-tuned and run through some effects – stuff to make it interesting, so when you hear an acoustic record it’s not just another unplugged record, or, ‘Here comes ‘Layla’ with no distortion.’ I find that stuff tedious. If you’re going to go in the studio and take 20 days to do something, why not make it as different as you can and take some chances? I think the fans are ready for something different. I certainly am. I don’t even listen to the radio anymore, there’s no point. I don’t even hear guys playing music. I hear Pro-Tools. If you’re hearing a singer, you’re not really hearing them sing anymore, you’re just hearing them get lucky one out of 50 times when they got it right. I’m not into music like that. I’d rather listen to *Disraeli Gears*, where there are mistakes but the record is so compelling you can’t deny it.”

## So how did you and Billy put the EP together?

“We cut all the drums live, straight to tape with no click tracks and no Pro-Tools and no digital editing. It’s all just me going for it, and Billy played guitar or bass, whatever was easier to track to. When you don’t have the benefit of playing with a band, you’ve got to imagine, ‘Okay, this is what I imagine the bass is going to sound like.’ There was a lot of experimentation and it took a long time. We would put the drums down and then the bass, and get to the rhythm guitars and realise something wouldn’t work so we’d have to backtrack. I think it re-solidified our musical relationship and it just proved that we can be a rock band and totally self-sufficient on our own, just the two of us, which I prefer because we work at such a fast rate we tend to get bogged down in a band scenario.”

## How did you get your drum sound?

“I had a Maple Custom Absolute set made, but I had 60° bearing edges put on it as opposed to 45°, to get more of a vintage sound. You end up getting a little more shell sound and a little less head attack, which I really enjoyed, and that’s become my touring kit. It’s somewhere between Lenny White and JR Robinson, *Off The Wall* Michael Jackson – that type of sound but in a rock context. When you apply those tonalities to a wide-open drum sound, you really get something cool. I’m not into the idea that it’s the drummer’s job to make it pleasant for the engineer. I’m the other way, I like the way my drums sound when I walk up to them and it’s the engineer’s job to figure it out. I don’t use any internal or external muffling. I just try to keep them in tune. I like them as wide open and ambient as possible. Obviously a song like ‘Neverlost’ needs a drier drum sound and that’s what we went for. We had a four-mic set-up through a Fairchild compressor and really went for that small Beatles room sound for the most part. The rest of the record was recorded at a place called Sage And Sound, which has a great concrete live room with some great sonics.”

## Which tracks on the album do you think stretched you as a player?

“I think ‘7 Shades Of Black’ is a good song for drums, some of the fills on there are really good. I think ‘Orchid’ is a great drum performance. I think *Zeitgeist* is probably my best drumming ever on a Pumpkins record. A song like ‘United States’ was a bit of a journey, it took a while to write the drum part. I borrowed from an old Deep Purple song, ‘Chasing Shadows’, which has a double paradiddle between two floor toms, and I’ve always wanted to use that groove. Ian Paice is one of my all-time favourite drummers. I watched a Deep Purple concert from 1972 the other day and the band stops in the middle of that song ‘The Mule’, and Ian goes into his solo and all of a sudden it’s a big band drum solo. That’s what he’s playing – Buddy Rich and Louie Bellson – it’s wonderful. All those guys, Ginger

Baker, Ian Paice, even Bonham, they all had that Gene Krupa pocket.”

## Is jazz where your passion comes from at the moment?

“Oh yeah. I grew up in a jazz household. My dad played clarinet and the first drummer I heard was Gene Krupa. That’s where my head has always been. I think part of what makes me different – if I am different – is that I try to approach rock drumming from a jazz standpoint and I think it really works. When you hear rock but it has a foundation of liberation then I think it resonates with people. I don’t think rock is meant to be stiff. Rock is based on the blues, which is all about emotion, and the drummer’s job is to deliver the emotion. It’s not to deliver the maths equation. You listen to Elvin Jones, it’s like, ‘Where is that guy’s time coming from?’ I watched this live DVD the other day and I almost fell out of my chair. This one snare hit – I could have made a cup of coffee in between bars, but it was still somehow in the time. When I hear stuff like that I just know that there’s more work to do.”

## How about playing live? Do you like to improvise?

“I’m not into playing the same thing every night. I like to record the songs in the studio and get them to the point live where all the parts are clicking. Once I’m playing them pretty much perfectly every night, then I like to branch out and take them somewhere different, insert new fills, new breaks, re-arrange stuff, because it gets boring. I’m a huge jazz fan and that’s the spirit in which I play. I’m not into playing pre-recorded music, I’m into playing whatever the hell I feel like. That’s fun for the fans too, because it’s not a cookie cutter show that’s the same every night... I think through the years I’ve developed my style to where people expect me to play differently every night. It’s different for everybody. When you see a Rush show, you want Neil Peart to play all that stuff note for note. I’m a fan of Neil Peart, I grew up on it, but do you want to be playing the same drum solo for 25 years? I’m more [a fan of] Elvin: whatever’s going to happen is going to happen. Once the stick hits the drum, it’s God’s note after that!” **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Smashing Pumpkins, Jimmy Chamberlin Complex

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Smashing Pumpkins *Gish* (1992),

Smashing Pumpkins *Siamese Dream* (1994), Smashing Pumpkins *Mellon Collie...* (2005)





# Stewart Copeland

When The Police announced a mega-stadium reunion tour in 2007, *Rhythm* was first in line to get the low-down on the legendary Stewart Copeland's return to his famous Tama kit

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

Stewart Copeland revolutionised drumming with a dynamic style that blossomed with The Police, the supergroup he helped create in the late '70s with megastar Sting and guitar hero Andy Summers. The era that preceded him could be described as 'BC' – 'Before Copeland' – when rock drumming was loud and unsubtle. On classic albums *Outlandos D'Amour* (1978) and *Reggatta de Blanc* (1979), the symmetry of Sting's passionate vocals and Summer's celestial guitar was perfectly complemented by Stewart's supremely intelligent percussion.

Adapting Jamaican reggae rhythms on songs such as 'Roxanne' and 'Walking On The Moon,' Copeland was also a driving rocker, urging ahead numbers like 'Canary In A Coalmine' and 'Demolition Man.' As well as playing with a manic ferocity, born out of his original desire to create a '70s punk rock group, Stewart later developed his highly sophisticated style, reviving the hi-hat with refreshing ingenuity and playing tricky patterns and cross-sticking on his tight and responsive snare drum. Such crisp creativity set a new benchmark for drumming for decades to come.

Copeland was different from predecessors like John Bonham and Ginger Baker. A highly educated young American, with a sharp mind and strongly developed worldview, he was born Stewart Armstrong Copeland in Alexandria, Virginia, USA (16 July, 1952) and grew up in Beirut, where he began playing drums aged 13. When Stewart was a child his trumpet-playing father – a member of Glenn Miller's orchestra before becoming a founder of the CIA – was posted to Cairo and remained based in the Middle East. Stewart later went to university in California where he studied media and music. In 1975 he travelled to England to become tour manager for Joan Armatrading and the group Curved Air. When their drummer quit, Stewart took over the gig, backing singer Sonja Kristina.

As the punk rock movement began to take a grip on the UK music scene, Stewart could see that it offered a more realistic, challenging future. When Curved Air split in 1976, Copeland began planning his own 'New Wave' high-energy group, which evolved into The Police. He recruited guitarist Henry Padovani and a bass player and singer he'd spotted in Newcastle called Gordon Sumner, nicknamed 'Sting'. In 1977 Andy Summers joined as second guitarist, before Padovani's eventual departure cemented the final three-piece line-up.

Following the band's 1985 split and resulting solo careers, 22 years later The Police came back together for a sold out 2007 grand world tour.

## How was the reaction to The Police reunion tour, and what's it like being back on the road with Sting and Andy?

"It's been incredible. There is so much excitement around the show that it is damned amusing. I'd never heard of double stadium acts before. There are arena bands and stadium acts and this time we're actually

doing double stadiums! We played one baseball stadium twice. I read in a newspaper that we're the biggest-selling ticket on Ticket Master. Number two is a Walt Disney ice show. That takes a bit of the zing out of it. If it was the Stones, U2 or Madonna, that would be something to be chuffed about. We're doing a 'runner' tonight, which means we play the show, run straight off the stage, catch a plane and off to the next city."

## It was a shock when The Police suddenly decided to get back together. What happened?

"Yeah, it was a shock for me too. The phone call came out of the blue and we started rehearsing. The next thing you know we're playing to thousands of people. Sting made the first move to get us back together. How are we getting on? Well on the one hand we're all older and wiser. On the other hand we're more cantankerous and set in our ways. Our foibles are now concretised so it requires a great deal of zen to deal with each other. But there is a deep, everlasting bond, which no disagreement can ever shake. And we do have many disagreements over the music. Fast/slow, loud/quiet, up/down – every which way. We all three of us care passionately about it and so we do have a lot of conflict about that. But it somehow seems that conflict, which is the same old thing we used to have, does seem to be the furnace that produces the heat."

## How different is the revived band?

"We are all better players. Particularly Andy. He must have been practising solidly for 20 years. He used to talk obsessively with Sting about his parts. Andy was very much into playing beautifully crafted guitar parts and never got around to playing solos that much. Now, he's really got that stuff down, and in the place where there used to be a four-bar solo, we stretch it out and he just goes and goes. Andy is blazing on this tour."

## How is Sting shaping up? You and he were once notorious for your fierce disagreements...

"Sting is the Sun King, y'know. He is the Lion of Judah. He just walks up to the front of the stage and takes control. It doesn't matter what kind of audience; he grabs it by the throat. It's alright for me at the back of the stage. I just keep out the way, but I'm up there with the other two. In a trio there is plenty of room for each of us all to go hogwild."

## You conceived the idea of The Police. Do you see it as your band?

"Yes, it's still my band. But it's also Andy's and Sting's band. That bond is what enables us to push the parameters of conflict. It's an essential part of making the music. We don't just mess around."

## Have you updated the way you play the hits?

"There was a lot of discussion about taking a different approach to the Police songs. I think we've got exactly

the right balance between what's written and the mystery ingredient that you don't expect. We're still struggling with 'Don't Stand So Close To Me'. I don't know why that is, but it's getting closer to the original version every time we mess with it."

## You still play Tama, a brand you switched to in the late '70s before Japanese-made drums became fashionable. But hasn't your kit got a little bigger of late?

"Sure. I've got these percussion risers on stage as well as the kit. I use a timpani gong drum, chimes, bells and crotales. I've got the most enormous gong in the world. Bigger than John Bonham's, bigger than Neil Peart's."

## What do you remember about the early days of touring with The Police?

"Well, it was a different band and a different era. It's almost unrelated to this current mission. We've been apart longer that we've ever been together. We were apart for 23 years and we were only together for eight years. At first I started writing material for the group, until we discovered that Sting was an incredible songwriter, so I backed off. Great songs were coming out one after the other, so who could argue? Of course, I can remember when we first recorded 'Roxanne' and 'Walking On The Moon', but to be honest I can't now really remember what it was like in the studio or quite how we put them together."

"The whole memory thing kind of got finished and punctuated when I did my movie about The Police, *Everyone Stares*. That kind of put a full stop on the end of the whole 'first time around' Police experience. I thought to myself, 'That was it, done and dusted.' But that was exactly the point when Sting phoned. The film wasn't even a walk down memory lane. It was just tidying up a garage full of memories. Even though it was about my old band it was so long ago that it could have been any one else's band. There is some really fascinating footage that stands up on its own and that's what excited me as a filmmaker, but not as the participant in an adventure. When Sting called, The Police was, by then, something I'd completely forgotten about. It could just as easily have been Jimmy Page calling and asking me to play with Led Zeppelin." **R**

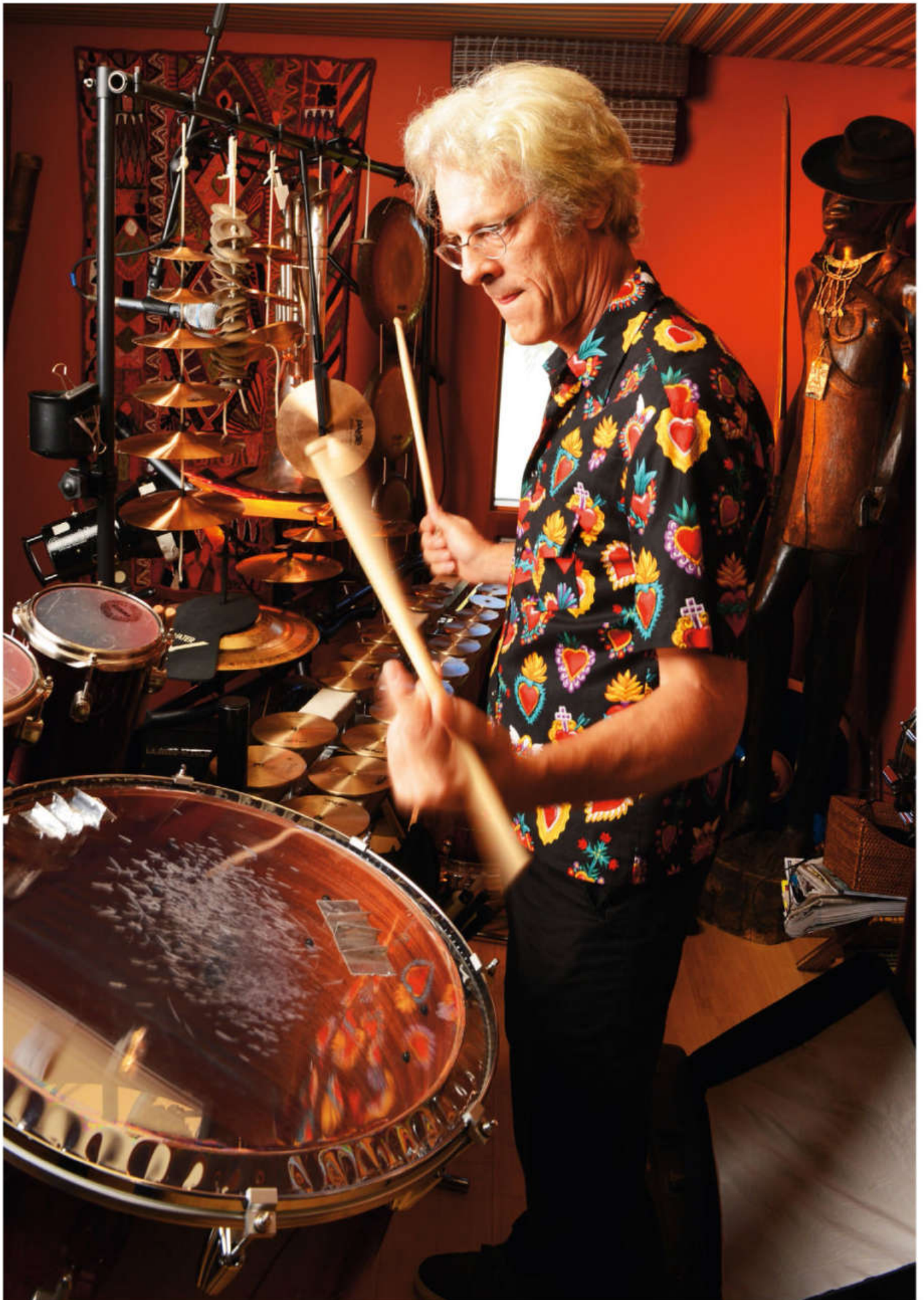
## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
The Police, Oysterhead,  
Curved Air

**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Police  
*Outlandos D'Amour* (1978),  
The Police *Regatta de Blanc* (1979), The Police  
*Zenyattà Mondatta* (1980)





Robert Downs

# Alex Van Halen

Along with his guitar virtuoso brother Eddie, Alex injected a new level of technical brilliance and flamboyant showmanship into hard rock more than 30 years ago with his band Van Halen

WORDS: TERRI SACCONI

In possession of a blistering double-bass drum technique and a textured style that calibrates both subtle grooves and monster riffs, Alex Van Halen is an indisputable drumming icon. When you also consider his penchant for live solos so melodic that they sound like compositions in themselves, it's arguable Alex should be an even bigger star. No matter. Along with his younger brother, the guitar virtuoso Eddie, Alex has spent more than two decades in the family business, the hard rock band Van Halen.

Despite Van Halen's rotating lead singers, Eddie's battle with cancer, and the band's mixed fortunes during the late '90s, the two brothers remain inseparable. The artistic alchemy they share is, perhaps, where the real magic in Van Halen lies.

Born in 1953 in the Netherlands, Alexander Van Halen had music in his blood. His dad, Jan, was a well-respected clarinetist who emigrated with his family to Pasadena, California, in the early '60s. From his earliest years, Alex was fascinated with music, partly because of his father's practising incessantly in the family home. It was his parents' hope that the two boys would go on to become classical pianists. But rock'n'roll proved too alluring to resist.

A pre-teen Alex took up Flamenco guitar, while Eddie drummed, but the two boys soon swapped instruments. The first incarnation of Van Halen soon became America's biggest hard rock band, culminating in the success of the synth-driven, chart-topping 1984. Inimitable frontman David Lee Roth departed soon after and was replaced by Sammy Hagar, but Van Halen sustained world dominance until the early '90s. Destructive inter-band politics followed, along with a disastrous album with singer Gary Cherone (Extreme).

The last few years has seen the Van Halen brothers reunited with David Lee Roth, with a 2012 album, *A Different Kind Of Truth*, and Alex's nephew (and Eddie's son) Wolfgang joining on bass.

But when *Rhythm* met Alex in 2005 the band had, perhaps surprisingly, reunited with Sammy Hagar and come roaring back with a double CD, *The Best Of Both Worlds*, and a sellout US tour.

## Does the band's longevity surprise you?

"Anybody who makes music will tell you that you get a rush from playing every night. To really love what you do is a privilege. My father did this for a living; now I've been doing it my whole life. We were lucky because we were in the right place at the right time when this took off. We got into the position to make records and tour."

## You and Ed have always stuck by each other...

"When Ed and I came to America as kids, we didn't know the language and, if you'll excuse the pun, everything was foreign to us. We had each other, we were buddies. And then of course the music bond made it that much tighter. We'll duke it out sometimes. The closer the bond, the more intense the fight. We had

all the typical brother stuff when we were young, and lots of physical fights. But now, not so much. We're like yin and yang, but we do whatever it takes for us to realise our dreams, as long as it doesn't compromise the musical aspect."

## Do you still have the biggest drum kit in rock?

"I don't know where that rumour started [laughs]! Actually, in 1991 I went out with a single kit. One kick, a couple of toms and that's it. It was kind of a reaction to the previous tour when I had the 25 drums up there."

## Has your taste in drums changed much over the years?

"It's all wood, always. That's my overriding philosophy: I say 'go for natural'. There's no EQ on any of the drums. Just throw the mics up. It's through the choice of mics that you get the EQ response. I don't want the board being touched. The drums sound great on their own and it's the sound guy's job to pump that through the PA. I also still use Ludwig. They are the Rolls Royce of drums. The greats played them and I have played them since day one. The first real drum kit I bought was a Ludwig Standard because of Ginger Baker. I bought what I thought were the same sizes as his - judging by pictures of him. But after I bought it I found out I couldn't play it because all the drums were up way too high! To get money for it, I had to work in a machine shop and, after taxes, I got about a dollar an hour. It took me a long time to pay for that kit, and when I finally got the money together, I paid the guy in one-dollar bills. I counted out 1,000 one-dollar bills for 1,000 hours of my life that it took to earn those drums. I still have that kit. I played it on the first four Van Halen records."

## How did your voluminous and distinctive snare drum sound develop?

"One of my earliest memories is of our dad downstairs in the basement practising playing one note for hours on end, just to get the timbre right. I never heard anyone get the sound and the tone out of a clarinet the way my dad did. It had a woodsy resonating quality. It wasn't tinny, it wasn't thin. Jumping forward to us making records, to me, drums are an extension of my body and they're my voice. They should sound the way I hear them, my snare sound included. I always went for that very rich, deep sound. You're always battling with engineers and the people doing the technical aspects of it. We're still fighting for that and one of these days, we'll get it 100 percent right. But then again, maybe if we get that perfect sound, we'll put out the fire. So let's hope we don't get it [laughs]!"

## In the studio, you always managed to capture your drums in a live-sounding context.

"We always played together as a live unit [Alex, Eddie and bassist Michael Anthony]. If someone blew it,

we had to redo it. But that's the only way to do it, to get that live vibe.

"This 'live' sound also goes back to what I grew up listening to. Ginger Baker and John Bonham were guys I really liked and were notorious for not having any mics near the drums. They knew that drums need to resonate in their own space and the further away you get from the drum, the more it sounds the way it should. Unfortunately, with the advent of multi-track recording, the engineers felt the need to isolate everything and mic the drums themselves. So, as I said, you constantly battle that with engineers. It's no different than any other creative endeavour. The skill is in getting people to come around to the way you want it done, then make them feel like it was *their idea*!"

## Your double-bass skills are legendary. 'Hot for Teacher' (1984) is a prime example. Was that song double-tracked?

"It was actually done in one take only. Louie Bellson was probably responsible for my interest in double bass. I had an old 78rpm record of him with four drum solos and I'd listen to that endlessly. Then when Ginger Baker came along with his double bass, that sealed it. He was my idol at that age. Anyway, back to the double bass: Ed and I played a lot of Cream stuff, and I couldn't do that with one foot. I learned that early so it became second nature. I guess it's like learning a language: it's better to do it earlier because it's just easier."

## What advice would you like to pass on to the younger players reading this?

"We're on this planet to interact with other people and mix things like music into the general consciousness. You need to be sharing, and that transfers to making music. You lock yourself up in the studio for a certain period of time, but then you go out and share what you've created. To me, drums are the best reflection of life. Not to be overly philosophical, but life is a contradiction in that you live to die. That's a paradox. Drums, by their very nature, are something with very little sustain, very short bursts of sound - yet you are trying to make music as fluid as you can by hitting them. That's a paradox, too." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



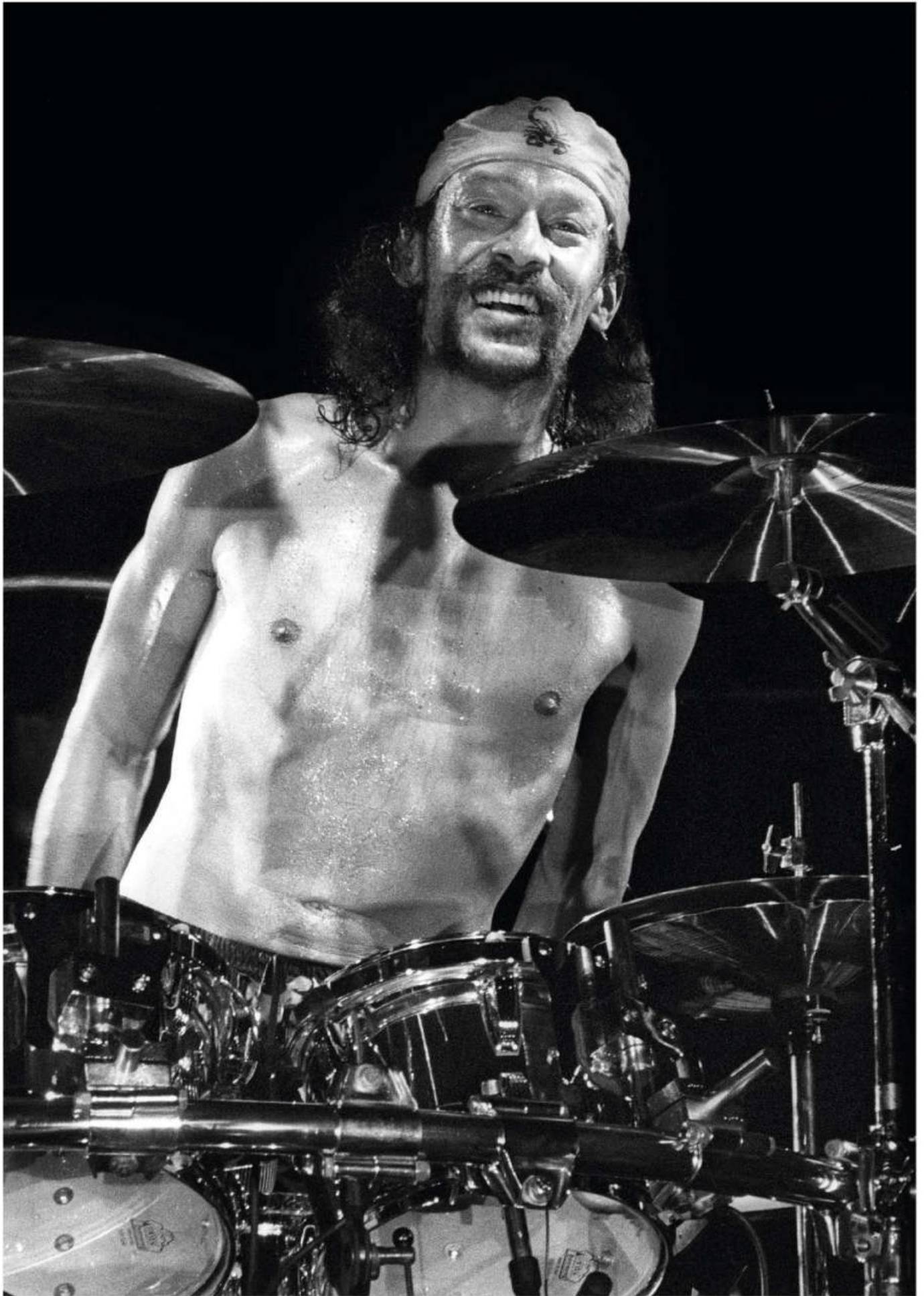
### RELATED ARTISTS:

Van Halen

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Van Halen, *Van Halen* (1978),  
Van Halen II (1979), Van  
Haln Women And Children First (1980), Van  
Haln 1984 (1984), Van Halen 5150 (1986)





# Charlie Watts

Charlie Watts has been the rock behind the Rolling Stones for 50 years. But behind the swagger and groove of the Stones' music is a jazz-loving player with incredible swing and taste

WORDS: PAT REID/RHYTHM

**A**rguably the world's biggest and greatest rock band, The Rolling Stones, celebrate 50 years together this year. Behind the Jagger swagger and the unquestioned status of Keef as guitar god, many consider drummer Charlie Watts to be the coolest member of the band. And with good reason. Understated but impeccably laying down the grooves behind the r'n'b influenced rock tunes, Charlie's swing was what made the Stones so essential and influential. Yet many fans who have enjoyed his key contribution to Stones classics like 'Paint It Black', 'Gimme Shelter', 'Tumbling Dice', 'Honky Tonk Woman' and 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' might not be aware that Watts is a schooled jazzier, whose boyhood hero was Charlie Parker. To this day, Watts continues to indulge his passion for jazz with the Charlie Watts Quintet and Tentet and has put out a number of recordings paying tribute to Bird, as well as covering jazz and swing classics.

Growing up in Wembley, London, Charlie discovered drums through the playing of Chico Hamilton, and it wasn't long before he was playing first in a swing band and then with British blues pioneer Alexis Korner, whose Blues Incorporated were regulars at the G Club in Ealing. The G Club was patronised by Mick, Keith and Brian Jones, who inducted Charlie into their band, even as he continued his labours as a commercial artist.

*You continued with the day job even once you'd joined the Stones. Did you enjoy your work?*

"Yes. I'm very easy like that. I was a designer, mostly advertising. I did three years as a lettering artist. I went from there to a design studio, an agency. I was doing it all the time I was with Alexis, and I was doing it when I was with The Stones, but I was 'between engagements' when I officially joined the Stones. I'd played with them before, but I was asked to come along to rehearsals by Brian [Jones]. I used to hang out with them, go to job interviews, come back and we'd play the 100 Club. I'd get up in the morning and Brian and Keith would be snoring away, and I'd think, 'I'm not going to an interview today - we're playing tonight anyway.'

"We had a lot of work in London and Richmond, four or five nights a week. We didn't actually go around England in the early days. It's terribly glamorous being on the stage, and suddenly I was in a band where everybody was clapping. Alexis was a big band to be in, but The Stones had such a mad following and it got bigger every week. And then The Beatles happened, and it became the thing to be in a beat group. And it was a great spawning ground for some strange players, some good. The Animals were a very good band live. The Stones were the best though, I think."

*What made you the best?*

"Dunno. I think we swung a lot. The Animals used to swing as well. They used to do a great version of 'Almost Grown'. What made us the best? Being my band

[laughs]. We had the best frontman in Mick, and he was, even in those days. And Keith was such a good rhythm guitar player, which is what he used to play in those days. He used to lead in but it was mostly rhythm. And Brian was good at what he did, so it was a great sound to have in the band. He's like Ronnie [Wood], who's a great guy to do anything. Ronnie's a great adapter."

*Did you ever feel any regret that you came from this jazz background and suddenly you were playing rhythm and blues?*

"No. I got introduced to this music. I was never a rock'n'roll fan when I was a kid. I used to love Fats Domino and Little Richard, but I was never an Elvis fan, I never followed the charts, and I liked Duke Ellington and Bird. I never had any trouble listening to jazz; it's very easy for me. Some of it I think, 'Oh God, I wish this would end,' but not all jazz or improvised music is good. Most of it is just trying to be good. But when it does peak, it's of a standard that is unbelievably high.

"But I got into this world with Alexis and The Stones. I'd never heard of Muddy Waters, and Keith and Brian used to play endless Chuck Berry and Jimmy Reed. And Jimmy Reed's Earl Phillips is one of the great jazz drummers in a way. He's got such a quirky way of playing, and Chicago shuffles are technically very difficult to do. And when you see them do it properly, the old guys, it's fantastic, because they come down on the backbeat so loud. They get this shuffle-like thing in between - it's fantastic - without the feet going. And usually they play very quiet, the old guys. So to me it was not really any different, to be honest.

"I was young and we were off, playing around England with The Everly Brothers, who then had a fabulous drummer. He was young, 19 at the time. He's on 'Layla' - he wrote 'Layla' with Eric. Jim Gordon, he was a fantastic player. We'd never seen a band as slick as that. That our we had Bo Diddley. I think Little Richard was on tour, a fantastic crowd of people to be stuck up in Leeds with, that lot. Jerome Green was the most incredible maraca player, and Mick learnt how to play the maracas properly, he can play waltz time and all that. The hard thing is stopping them, and he learnt that from Jerome."

*Did you feel competition with the other drummers around at the time?*

"No. Yeah... well, you're young, you know, so you get that. But I always gave up. Alexis' band got so bloody big and good, with Jack Bruce and Graham Bond, that I just stepped out of it and let in Ginger, who at the time was probably the best player around. He still plays great, Ginger. He's the nearest thing to an African we've got. But you used to see a lot of guys playing - Bobby Elliott is a really good player. Originally, I think, they had another guy, who played with them when we first went up the M1 and played away from home. The Stones, that is - I'd been up there once with Alexis."

*What was it like when you went into a recording studio for the very first time? When you heard yourself playing on record were pleased or was it a somewhat weird experience for you?*

"I was thrilled. Glyn Johns took us in there, we did eight tracks in about 10 minutes and went off and played a club. I was sitting in the same booth where Phil Seamen used to do jingles, so I was happy to pretend I was there. It was IBC, opposite the BBC. Glyn did it when they stopped work at 5.30; he had some spare time. I personally have been very lucky with engineers, because they've all been good with drum sounds. Then when we did 'Satisfaction' in LA, the RCA guy was great as well. I can see him now with his Tinterello cigar."

*It all seems like such an incredibly exciting time, some of the musical changes you saw between 1960 and 1970...*

"I think now that you're not given time to learn what you do. One of the greatest things about jazz drummers is that you have to learn to play with a piano player acoustically, with a saxophone, a trumpet, at those volumes without losing intensity. And to watch an artist like Art Blakey do it was incredible, because he would go from deafening noise to one of his tricks, this press roll he'd do on the cymbal, and then he'd come down and your breathing would be louder than his playing, but there'd be no let up in the intensity. So there isn't this, and there isn't the playing going on. Now the whole thing is set out. The kid learns to dance, do a video... the backing track's already done. I like loops and all that and I like rap rhythms. It's great to hear, but it's such a produced thing. If you're learning to play you never play a bass drum like they do on a rap record, because the tracks are altered, the sounds are altered."

*You seem to be as passionate about music now as you were at the beginning.*

"I love playing, I always wish I was better. One of the faults of listening to great players is that you know you could never be that. I knew that when I was 20 I could never accomplish that. I'm not rounded enough or dedicated enough. But I've never lost the passion of wanting to play the drums." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Rolling Stones,  
The Charlie Watts Tentet

**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Rolling Stones *Aftermath*

(1966), The Rolling Stones *Let It Bleed* (1969), The Rolling Stones *Sticky Fingers* (1971), Charlie Watts Quintet *From One Charlie* (1991)





# Art Blakey

A chief innovator in the bop style of drumming and leader of one of the most lauded jazz groups of all time, the Jazz Messengers

WORDS: HUGO PINKSTERBOER

**A**rt Blakey first took up the drums at the point of a gun. He had been actually booked to play the bar piano, but there was one tune he didn't know. Brooking no excuses, the bartender whipped out a revolver and ordered him to the drum stool: "Play the drums if you wanna stay around..." And you just did what they told you. I was told to play the drums, so I played the drums, because I like to eat! Those were the days, man!"

An orphan, Art was married and father of a child at 15. Self-taught, he worked in a steel mill to make ends meet while he played first piano then drums: "I'm a depression baby. My influences were hunger and poverty. Stay away from them if you can, man."

His early career involved spells with Fletcher Henderson, Mary Lou Williams and the bebop-influenced big band of singer Billy Eckstine, plus stints backing Miles Davis, Fats Navarro, Dizzy Gillespie, Dexter Gordon and Charlie Parker. During this time Art was also leading his own band, eventually being 'discovered' and taken under the wing of the jazz label Blue Note. Art's outfit was called the Jazz Messengers, a band which had grown out of The Seventeen Messengers, featuring Sonny Rollins and Bud Powell.

In 1957, two influential percussion albums were released – *Drum Suite* and *Orgy In Rhythm*. These featured four jazz drummers (Specs Wright, Art Taylor, Papa Jo Jones and Art Blakey) and four Cuban percussionists, the first time that only percussion had been featured on one album. Since then, Art and his Jazz Messengers have grown and prospered, releasing countless albums throughout the '60s, '70s and '80s.

When *Rhythm* meets Art [*in 1987*], he is very much in control, still bearing the message of jazz as "music of the spirit" and confident of its continuing survival.

"I won't stop until they pad me in the face with a shovel! When I grow too old to play, I'll sit down and get a bunch of tapes and records and just listen. I ain't got no time to do so now. Don't even have a record player. I'm a happy man. I produce my own records, I have a corporation, I have a booking licence, I'm my own boss... I work for Art Blakey and if it ain't like I wanna, I go home and play with my toes and my children."

In performance, meets Art: the sheer enjoyment of the man, from the opening of the first bar to the closing of the last.

"Oh yeah, I enjoy myself always. I like to play, that's my life and that's what I like to do. Many young musicians, especially in the rock scene, look like they've been *condemned* to make music – they look like they're being punished. Now, I think they enjoy themselves, but they just think that's the way they're supposed to look... dig what I'm saying? Image-building, they don't know how wrong they are, let me tell you! People like to see you enjoy yourself on stage. It's your job as a musician to entertain them."

Does Art believe that jazz is a musical form that can be taught? "Sure – you can teach yourself. You have to

go to concerts and hear all these cats play and, in the first place, you have to learn to play and control your instrument. Go to school, get your diploma... but then come on down the road and get your education. If you've got talent, you got it and it will come out. And if not? Well you don't have to become a big star, just go out and play with a group, maybe once a week.

"Music is the best therapy there is," he continues. "It gives you a chance to let off all your aggression – whatever is buggin' you. Just get that to the bandstand, get all fresh and tackle that problem. If you can play, you can handle everything. But if you really want to be good, then you've got to work real hard, man, and it takes time and patience. So please don't start out practising for two hours. You get bored and lose interest. First take 15 minutes for a couple of days, then say 'mmm', you like it, so you get 20 minutes, half an hour, maybe an hour. You'll be surprised. Everybody thinks Rome is built in one day. Man, they're in a hurry."

## HOW TO SWING

So what is it, we ask Art, that makes one person swing, where another sounds leaden and lumpy?

"Well, you can listen and hear that for yourself. There are different approaches, different concepts in the way people attack notes. But you'll hear that – you know if something is happening to you. People tend to forget that, they just read what the critics say. They don't wanna think for themselves. It's so dangerous to go by what the critics tell you. *You* are the one to decide whether you like some band or musician."

His own talents, however, have been rightly recognised by both critics and audiences.

"Am I so talented? Well, maybe you could call it that. You have to try whatever talent you have, that's what makes it interesting. There's always something to learn. It never stops, and the more you learn, the dumber-son-of-a-bitch you find out you are. Nobody wrote The Book on drumming... not yet. On the other hand, there's nothing new on the planet. What you hear is just new concepts of existing ideas."

And yet Art himself has been dubbed an innovator... "Well that's what I try to be. I don't know if I am one.

I try to play something different and to be different. I discover new things all the time but I'm not the one to launch a revolution. The things I discovered have been there all the time, but other people have overlooked them. I didn't. You see, jazz is a spiritual art form, so you're always busy making up new stuff. You never see sheets of music on the bandstand, it's from the Creator to the artist to the audience... split-second timing."

One of the most distinctive aspects of Art's playing is his cymbal sound. Is this due to the way he plays them or the cymbals he chooses?

"I don't know nothing about that. I play anything and make it sound the way I want it to sound. Just give me a cymbal and I play it. I don't select my cymbals, I ain't got time for that. Charlie Parker played 'The Blessing'

with a plastic horn and nobody heard the difference. In the war, a fourth of my cymbals were cut up and you couldn't get none in that time. Sticks too. We played with chair arms, anything... *anything!* It's not the instrument, it's the one who plays it."

## CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION

Although he has made dozens of records, Art has the reputation of never being happy with any of them.

"Well, I never made a good one yet. You ask me why I feel that way. Because I'm my own worst critic, that's why. The rest of the musicians always were okay, but I wasn't satisfied with my work. I could have done much better. There's a danger in satisfaction too. You don't *get* satisfied, you know better than that. You have to keep improving. Satisfaction makes you lazy."

One interesting fact from Art's past career is that he once played for Stravinsky.

"Well, hardly. I did a roll on a tympani drum, that's all. I never felt like playing classical music. It cuts your freedom off, being under a director... When you play jazz, well damn the notes, it's the feeling that counts. I couldn't play no symphonies. All this copying they do impedes progress. In jazz you never play the same thing twice. If someone writes a tune for the Messengers, they won't recognise it no more when we've been playing it for a year or so. The composition is just a rough skeleton we go by. That's jazz!"

Or rather it's a certain type of jazz. If you listened to Buddy Rich's jazz band you'd get a completely different idea of what jazz is all about.

"Sure thing. If you made mistakes in Buddy's band, you were out. In my band you're fired if you *don't* make mistakes. Because then I know you're not trying!"

So is Art's musical philosophy based on constantly trying to come up with something new, even if it's as a result of the happy mistake?

"This life is like running a race. If you look this way or that they pass you, so you have to keep looking forward. You have to keep moving and developing yourself. The best place to do that is on the bandstand. That's what the Jazz Messengers are there for, and that's why you'll never find me playing a practice kit. I practise on the bandstand. And if something goes wrong? So what, there's always another chorus to try it again." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Jazz Messengers

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Art Blakey Art Blakey With

The Original Jazz Messengers

(1956), Art Blakey *Drum Suite* (1957),

Art Blakey *Moanin'* (1958)





# Dave Lombardo

Slayer's drumming colossus Dave Lombardo is one of thrash metal's most influential players, and all this having started out playing bongos...

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

**T**he world's most accomplished heavy metal drummers appear in the pages of *Rhythm*, and they agree that the most influential stick-wielding headbanger ever is a quietly-spoken Californian of Cuban descent who began his drumming career playing bongos in high school.

Dave Lombardo's almost inhuman skills behind the kit are barely matched by any other player. Sure, there are death metal drummers who blast faster, and funk percussionists with a similarly perfect pocket – but for that freight-train-coming-off-the-rails adrenaline rush, no one plays drums like Dave.

Raised on a blend of stadium metal and Cuban dance music in his youth, before the speed and aggression of hardcore punk overtook him, Dave pushed Slayer to colossal heights in the '80s before quitting in 1992 in disillusionment. He then spent most of the '90s as a session gun for hire before rejoining Slayer in 2002 for their triumphant comeback as undisputed kings of extreme metal.

## Was it playing bongos in school that led you to play the drums?

"Drums have always been a part of me, so it's hard to say. That was in the third grade, so I was probably nine years old – it could have been a stepping-stone to what was to come. My love for American rock'n'roll crept into my life then too, because sometimes they'd have a Latin band playing, and between sets a couple of guys would go up on stage and play rock music, like 'Long Train Running' by the Doobie Brothers, and 'Funkin' Care Of Business' by Bachman-Turner Overdrive."

## You were a disco DJ too.

"I was a DJ with this other guy, when I was 14 or 15. We were called A Touch Of Class! I was already a drummer by then, but I was in a tug-of-war between disco and Led Zeppelin. I'd have friends that were into rock and metal, and then I also had my Cuban friends who had the slicked-back hair, the nice shirts and the pleated pants. To Cubans, everything is dancing: nothing is 'sit back and listen'. I liked KISS at the time, and they'd all be like, 'How can you dance to that?'"

## Members of Slayer always attribute the speed of the early albums to you playing faster in rehearsals. What inspired you to play so fast?

"Punk, and also bands like Motörhead. A classic example is the song 'Overkill'. At the time that was fast, but looking back it's pretty darn slow compared to how bands are playing today. Songs by different bands inspired me, like 'Rock And Roll' by Led Zeppelin. That was exciting! It was fast, it was uptempo. There was a lot of curiosity in me about those fast songs. They made me feel good, so when Jeff [Hanneman, *Slayer* guitarist] played me hardcore punk, I was like, 'Wow! This is great!' Then, as Slayer was evolving, we would play Judas Priest-style riffs, but instead of this 4/4 beat [taps

*out beat with two snare hits per bar*], I played this [taps same riff, but with four snare hits] – just doubling up on the beat. Add the 18/19-year-old spirit, the excitement of going to rehearsal, and not paying attention to tempo, and that's why it got faster every time."

## When did you first realise that you were breaking new ground?

"When I was at the top of the polls in the local fanzines. You know: 'Best Drummer: Dave Lombardo'. All these little underground magazines were letting us know at the time that something new was going on."

## Was Metallica an influence on you?

"I knew that Metallica was out there, but I never looked to them for inspiration. I was aware of them and I enjoyed listening to their music, but it never really inspired me, personally, because I knew what he [Lars Ulrich] was doing. Like, 'I know how to do that, and I know how to do that.' I was always searching for stuff that I'd never heard before. For example, DRI – who was playing like Felix Griffin at that time? Nobody. That was more inspiring than listening to Metallica, just because of evolution. I was always like, 'Give me the next band, I'm sick of this.'"

## On Slayer's *South Of Heaven* (1988), there's a seven-second drum roll at the end of 'Ghosts Of War' that drummers often cite as influential.

"Yes – that was improvised. I don't map anything out before I go in, because it would take away the spontaneity and the creativity of my playing. With a lot of the stuff in the studio, I'll do take after take after take. Like, 'Okay, that was a good one, but let's do another, because I still have more energy.' I'll throw in as many variations of the same song as I can, to capture a very original piece. Maybe they'll say, 'That one was good, but the one you did three takes later was the one,' or they'll take half of one or the other and put them together."

## You're high in the mix on *South Of Heaven*...

"Yeah, I didn't like it! It sounds okay now, but back then, compared to what I'd heard on [1986 album] *Reign In Blood*, I was like, 'Whoa! I like hearing guitars too, like on 'Psychopathy Red', where everything is blended well. You can hear the rhythm guitars when the leads are going; the bass drums and the voices aren't overpowering; everything's nice."

## Are you a perfectionist?

"Yes. I have to admit I am, in a lot of ways. Everything has to be metronomically correct, although I never used a metronome until 1995, when I started Grip Inc."

## Does your playing require much correction afterwards in Pro-Tools?

"I don't think so. At least, I haven't heard anything! I

don't hear things that bother me. Maybe they'll say, 'This is a great take, but you were a little late on that hit,' and they'll move it."

## Are there any drumming tricks which are uniquely yours?

"The drum rolls, and the tasty bits I put in between. Even a stupid little bell in a section, that might make you think, 'That's Dave Lombardo.' Or maybe one hit on one tom – that's me. Just the little things: the nuances and the stuff that isn't in your face."

## People refer to your 'falling through the drums' rolls, as if it could come off the rails.

"I can't explain it... when I play, I feel like I travel to other worlds. The music's going, and the beat's going, but when I go through a drum roll, it's like I'm in a subconscious or subliminal place where I hear the beat going, but I'm going off on this drum roll and I'll come right back in on the one. I'll disappear for a minute, and I'll be in this really super-long drum roll and then bam! I'll come right back in. It's strange, but it's me."

## Which is the best Slayer album for drumming?

"Well, I put 100 percent into all the albums, but the one I like the best is *South Of Heaven* or *Seasons In The Abyss*. There's some good stuff on those records."

## When you played blastbeats on the Christ Illusion song 'Supremist', everybody wondered if Slayer were going to turn death metal...

"It's what the riff demanded. See, that's my thing – I can't close the door on other music. I expose myself to this stuff to stay on top and to let people know, 'Hey, I'm aware of what's going on!' Just because I don't play it, doesn't mean I'm not aware of it. I'll throw in little tidbits here and there. I've been listening to all this jungle. To me it's like England's rap. It's very cool. I love that music – I really enjoy it because it's fast, and it moves."

## So have you heard Cannibal Corpse and the other death metal bands doing blastbeats?

"I've heard it. Does it impress me? No, because too much is over-redundant. I can't tolerate it, it's just [hums series of machine-like blasts]... there's no feeling there." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Slayer, Fantômas

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Slayer

*Reign In Blood* (1986), *Slayer*

*South Of Heaven* (1988),

*Slayer* *Seasons In The Abyss* (1990)





# Roger Taylor

He has rocked you for 40 years with the massive drum sound he brought to legendary British rock band Queen

WORDS: LOUISE KING

**A**fter a less than successful encounter with the ukulele at the tender age of eight, Roger Meddows Taylor discovered drums and proceeded to teach himself to play by jamming along to his favourite rock'n'roll records using his mum's knitting needles and saucepans. After scraping together a proper drumset, Roger set about honing his craft with a variety of local cover bands. Even though he moved to London to study for a degree in dentistry, the budding young player had no intention of ever looking after people's teeth for a living. "I never actually wanted to be a dentist," he chuckles. "As far as I was concerned, it was always going to be rock'n'roll!"

After replying to an ad looking for a Mitch Mitchell-type drummer, Roger joined the band Smile, which featured Brian May on guitar and Tim Staffell on bass and vocals. When Tim left the band, Smile's biggest fan – a certain Farrokh Bulsara, aka Freddie Mercury – convinced Brian and Roger to carry on with him up front. They duly recruited bass player John Deacon, and, from the ashes of Smile, Queen was born.

The band's distinctive and incredibly powerful sound and production, coupled with their revolutionary layered vocals, propelled them onto the world stage and, subsequently, into becoming one of the biggest stadium rock bands of their generation.

Roger's trademark technique and love of big drums – not to mention his high vocal parts – formed an integral part of Queen's sound, but he was also a prolific songwriter for the group, penning, amongst others, 'Radio Ga Ga', 'A Kind Of Magic', 'I'm In Love With My Car' and 'These Are The Days Of Our Lives'. He also branched out on his own, recording four solo records, on which he played most of the instruments.

Many thought the tragic loss of Freddie Mercury in 1991 would be the end of Queen, but in 2005 Brian and Roger decided to tour again with Free's Paul Rodgers. "It was a pure accident we ended up playing with Paul, but it turned out to be marvellous fun, and Brian and I decided we both wanted to carry on," Roger explains. And with the interest and demand for their music showing no signs of diminishing, Queen toured in 2012 with *American Idol*'s Adam Lambert on vocals.

**With it being Queen's 40th anniversary, 2011 must have been a wonderful year for you.**

"It's fabulous that the music has stood the test of time, and the anniversary gave us a wonderful opportunity to look back and celebrate that. It's remarkable to realise that you have actually achieved your dreams and so much more... Never could we ever have expected that after all this time the music would still be played and be so popular. It's an amazing feeling and makes me very proud."

**The band's early output was prolific, wasn't it?**

"Especially Freddie – in that early period he was like a fountain and the ideas just poured out of him... The

quality of them was incredible too, and his entire self must have been taken up with writing and what we were producing. Every time I look back and think about him now, my respect and admiration for him just increases. He was even better than we thought – and we thought he was pretty damn good!"

**Going right back to the early days, how did you come to pick up a pair of sticks?**

"Well, my first instrument was actually ukele – which, to be honest, I couldn't even play! I was eight when I started my first band and we'd do Lonnie Donegan skiffle songs at school. Drums came along when I was about 12, and I just found that it was something I could do. I knew that I wanted to be a drummer after hearing 'Rock Around The Clock' by Bill Haley And His Comets on the radio, and soon after I discovered Little Richard... Well, you just can't beat that, can you?"

**As a self-taught player you developed your own very distinctive style and, as a result, you are a drummer who is always instantly recognisable.**

"It's very flattering that people say that. I think you either have the time in you or you don't, and I just seemed to have the knack and the right kind of wrists. And your wrists are so important, because that's where the snap comes from. I did teach myself, really just by learning the licks from my favourite records. And from the pot, where all of that got mixed up, I just forged my own style."

**Another integral part of the equation has always been that big drum sound...**

"The big sound was always very, very important to me, and it's why I was never really happy with our first album, *Queen*. They didn't let the drums sing enough and the sound was everything that I didn't want it to be – very deadened. I like my drums to sound natural, but deadening was very fashionable then. That sound is good for certain things, but it's not what I wanted and I was much happier with the way my drums sounded on our second and third albums."

**How did you become a singing drummer?**

"It was purely by accident, actually! In one of my early bands our lead singer left shortly before we had a gig to do, so I had no choice but to step in and start singing. We put the drums out front and I just got on with it... It is hard to cover both things and it was quite a jump, but luckily I learnt quickly. The real challenge was in the breathing, which is a whole new ball game!"

**Tell us about meeting Brian and Freddie...**

"[Brian and I] just clicked immediately – we had all the same heroes, the same musical influences and, when I heard him play, he just had this unique touch. I'd never heard anyone with that beautiful, delicate and melodic vibrato touch – and he also had that big sound, too. So

in that sense we were naturally drawn to each other and we also got on very well. Freddie used to hang around with us all the time and we all just co-existed. It was Freddie's idea, and a natural progression really, that he join us when Tim left. John [Deacon] came on board soon after, and that's when we became Queen. I remember we had three years of hard slog and then we finally got that first taste of success."

**Those first two albums, *Queen* and *Queen II* were successful in the UK, but it was your third record, *Sheer Heart Attack*, that made the rest of the world sit up and take notice...**

"Well, *Sheer Heart Attack* was the beginning of the most extraordinary run for us and, looking back now, there are so many incredible highlights... It was all so much fun – from the amazing South American tours, to those endless American arenas, to all the fantastic European shows. It was the most wonderful way to see the world and it was like being in a bubble. In the process we lost touch with a lot of our friends, but it was a damn good bubble to be in! It's funny too, because at the time it didn't seem that quick, but those records and tours came thick and fast..."

**Throughout everything you still managed to remain an incredibly strong unit, didn't you?**

"Everything we did was as a group, it was a true unit and a true democracy, and I think that's part of the secret of our success. There was that amazing chemistry between the four of us musically, and we got on pretty well together most of the time too. Of course we had our differences, but we stuck together."

**Nobody who saw your performance at Live Aid will ever forget it...**

"It's a real highlight. I remember we were all quite nervous, but we just put our heads down and went for it. The sound was terrible on stage, but we knew that we had a great sound engineer out front and everything about that day was fantastic – the weather, the audience, the whole atmosphere and the fact that music was actually doing some good in a pretty rotten world. Live Aid validated rock'n'roll and the power of the music." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Queen, Roger Taylor, The Cross

### CLASSIC CUTS: Queen

*Queen* (1973), *Queen Queen II* (1974), *Queen Sheer Heart Attack* (1974), *Queen A Night At The Opera* (1975), *Queen Jazz* (1978), *Queen A Kind Of Magic* (1986)





# Gavin Harrison

Gavin is a renowned session drummer, clinician and an odd-time pioneer with modern progressive rock band Porcupine Tree

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**G**avin Harrison built his reputation as a session player in a career that covered the spectrum from Iggy Pop's high energy punk to Lisa Stansfield's smooth soul and all points in between. Along the way he has written a regular column for *Rhythm* and produced a series of highly influential books and DVDs exploring his concepts of rhythmic manipulation.

In 2002 Gavin answered a call to join Porcupine Tree just as the band was about to record *In Absentia*, their major label debut for Warner Brothers. In the 10 years since, Porcupine Tree have played the biggest gigs of their career and Gavin is widely regarded as one of Britain's most exciting and innovative drummers.

## Was it difficult making the switch from life as a session player to being a full-time band member when you joined Porcupine Tree?

"No, it wasn't hard at all. I think it would be hard the other way around, if you just played in a band and then you left and tried your hand at doing sessions. It was very easy, really. The band gives me a lot of freedom to do whatever I want to do and hopefully I come up with parts they like. I'm not so confident of my own ability that I play something and then fall in love with it. I'm always unsure and thinking there is probably a better way. By the end of a tour I've nearly always found a better way to play the songs than on the record but you can only do what you can do at the time. We haven't got time to rehearse the album for 18 months before we record it."

## Do you naturally gravitate towards playing in odd time signatures?

"I like odd times, of course, I like playing in 4/4 as well. The thing I like the most is if it's got a groove. It doesn't necessarily have to have a two and four heartbeat to have a groove. We've heard possibly millions of variations of patterns in 4/4 and that's fine, but bands have not explored odd times as much as they have explored 4/4. You can do some interesting things in odd times and you can even disguise odd times so they don't sound odd. Sometimes I've reversed that and tried to make 4/4 sound like it is not in 4/4. A good example of that is a song we recorded called 'Mother And Child Divided' which is all in 4/4 but it sounds like it is in three groups of 10/16 plus 2/16 so it makes up 32/16 which is the same as two bars of 4/4. There is another song from the last record called 'Bonnie The Cat' which is all in 4/4 and I wanted to try to make a pattern that didn't sound like it was in 4/4. I like rhythmic manipulation, I think that is very interesting."

## Which players influenced your exploration of rhythmic manipulation?

"I was very influenced by Steve Jansen from the band Japan. He is a guy who I am sure would admit has no technique at all but he always put beats in unusual

places and I always sat there with a big grin on my face thinking, 'That's amazing. How did you think to put the snare drum in that place?' I always enjoyed that more than hearing someone play a fast fill. The fast fill is very amusing and you might want to play it over a few times, but that is just a couple of seconds in the piece. When you consider how many rhythms there have been in the last 60 years of recorded music, it is a great achievement if you can think of a unique rhythm for a song that suits the song and isn't just pointlessly complicated. It's composition from the drums."

## Do you think superhuman chops are a requisite for progressive music?

"No, not at all. I think if you are going to play fast things then obviously you need some amount of technique. I don't think we play any fast songs really. If you are going to swap time signatures quite a lot, which we do in Porcupine Tree, then you need to have a handle on those time signatures. When I was a kid I couldn't even play in 3/4 without getting lost. It's probably my fear of getting lost in odd time signatures that made me want to study them. When you start playing in 5/4 you play the most simple parts, like 'Take Five' - you play a pattern of three and a pattern of two and you keep hitting a crash cymbal every '1' to keep confirming that you are still in five. It takes some time and confidence to start thinking, 'Alright, I want to be as free and comfortable in 5/4 as I am in 4/4.' You just need to practise it."

"I used to have a little Roland TB-303 Bass Line, it was this little silver box and you could program basslines into it. So I would program basslines in odd times and it would loop continuously so I that could play for hours just in seven. After 30 minutes, it's not feeling that odd. It's just we've listened and practised so much in 4/4 that when it comes to seven, suddenly it's a big challenge."

## Do you take the approach of breaking down odd times into smaller segments?

"I would never count to 11, it's always broken down into smaller pieces, like a six and a five or two fours and a three. Seek the path of least resistance. If you can play a group of three, which I'm sure every drummer can, and you can play a group of two, which I'm sure every drummer can, then you can play odd times because every odd time can be broken down into groups of two or three. It's actually much simpler than you imagine. When you see bars of 11/8 written down they look absolutely terrifying and I wouldn't want to sit and try to read something in eleven without knowing what the key is - if it's two fours and a three, 'Ah, right.' You can play a two and three, then you can play five. Play two twos and a three, you can play seven. It's as simple as that. I don't like it to sound terrifying. I don't like to write music that sounds clever. That's never my intention."

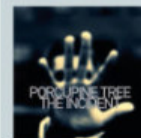
## What was it like working with Iggy Pop?

"He was great. I'd never seen Iggy live until the first night that I sat behind him onstage so I didn't realise he went as nuts as he did. On the first gig he ran to the front of the stage, turned around, looked at me and then just ran straight towards my kit. I thought, 'He's going to flatten me!' He put his foot on the bass drum and jumped right over my head. He's amazing. I became a fan of his while I was playing for him. I knew who he was and I knew some stuff about his music but I can't say it was my cup of tea back in the mid-'80s. I got a chance to audition for him so I went and bought a couple of records. I knew the two pieces they were going to play so I went there and just hit the drums as hard as I could, I went absolutely mad. He said, 'Okay, you've got the gig.' I thought, 'Wow, I don't know if I can play like that for 90 minutes!' He was fantastic fun. I've never seen a live performer like him."

## Do you ever miss the variety in your life as a session player?

"Yeah, I do miss the variety. I still make sessions outside of Porcupine Tree and for a while I was part of King Crimson. When you're a hired gun, some days are good, some days aren't. Some days you end up playing music you don't like for artists that you don't like and it's quite a pain, or you do jobs that are a bit of a trudge. If you're doing the same show every night, eight shows a week playing the same stuff, after a hundred shows you've completely lost your mind. You're so bored you don't know where you are. I did a stint playing a show called *Chess* in London and that was interesting working in the pit, working with a conductor. There were 30 musicians, strings on one side, there's woodwind, brass. I was in a Perspex box, there were about 50 charts, it was a really heavy reading gig. The first 10 times I did it I was terrified, the next 10 times I felt alright and then after that it felt like I was working on a factory line. There is no real room for improvising or having a laugh. You're under the stage so you can't even see the show and I was in a Perspex box so I couldn't even speak to anyone. It's bizarre. I did some deps on a show called *King: The Story Of Martin Luther King* and I found myself in a room, on my own, in the basement of the theatre, playing to a TV set. I could have sat there naked if I wanted to..." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Porcupine Tree, O5ric

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Porcupine Tree *In Absentia* (2002), Porcupine Tree *The Incident* (2009), Porcupine Tree *Fear Of A Blank Planet* (2007), O5ric *Circles* (2009)







# Vinnie Colaiuta

Session ace and master of odd-times, Vinnie Colaiuta has lent his incredible talent to the likes of Frank Zappa, Jeff Beck and Sting

WORDS: LOUISE KING

**W**ith a remarkably versatile session career that, in addition to Sting and Zappa, also boasts Joni Mitchell, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea and Jeff Beck to name but a few, Vinnie Colaiuta has become one of the most in-demand and revered players of his generation. His awesome technique, sublime groove and impeccable musicianship inspiring and influencing a plethora of drummers in the process.

*We've lost count of the number of drummers who have commented on your ability - particularly on Sting's *Ten Summoner's Tales* - to make odd-time sound so smooth. What's your secret?*

"Well, firstly I have to thank all the players who've said that - it's very flattering. The reason that it sounds the way it does is because one element of the kit is playing over the bar - meaning that it is maintaining a pulse that doesn't always resolve itself on the downbeat. Instead it carries over the space of two bars, so there is always a quarter-note pulse that would not necessarily happen otherwise. That idea when we recorded the record was nothing new to me - it was a vehicle that I regularly used and employed. But the idea to do it on those songs was actually Sting's, not mine. He preferred people to be able to recognise that quarter-note pulse."

*Even as a kid you were fascinated by odd time.*

"I'd just go and play in seven for an hour, drumming over the bars and enjoying that feeling of fluidity. And, once I was exposed to it, it was like a new vista for me. I'm sure that I had the propensity for it all along and, of course, I could make it sound like it was in odd time, but I also enjoyed smoothing it out. That just happened to get documented on *Ten Summoner's Tales*."

*Your first drum lesson had a pretty profound effect on you...*

"I went to see the band director at my school who gave me a drum book and pad, and then showed me how to hold the sticks - with traditional grip. Well, that was it... I walked out of the room feeling like I'd been hit over the head with a hammer. It was a major 'light bulb' moment for me, and it's when I knew that I wanted to be a professional drummer. Most kids would have thought that being given a pad and book was crap, but not me, I went nuts and couldn't eat it up fast enough!"

*Your dedication to self-improvement is legendary and even at such a young age your desire to learn was insatiable, wasn't it?*

"I was doing the whole bit - jazz, orchestral, orchestral rock, marching bands, drum camps, everything... I was a good geek for learning information and that information was valuable, because it was the beginning of a whole process of development that took years. As a teenager I could assimilate information quickly but,

what I didn't realise until later is that you have to let that information gestate... When you're young you think you're a hot-shot, ready for everything because you've played along to records and learnt all those little tricks. But, here's the thing: you don't know how and why those drummers played what they did until you have the benefit of experience. I've sweated blood - literally - and put a lot of work into what I do, and these days so many people are not prepared to put that time and effort in. Everybody wants to be Superman overnight, and that's encouraged by a media where everything is instantly available - be that visually or audibly.

"And please don't just break everything down to chops and groove either, because that means you are only looking at two dimensions when there are so many more... Basically the whole thing is process, but life is process. Forgive me for sounding clichéd but the joy is in that process and the fact that there is always something new to aspire to."

*You were accepted into Berklee, but you were not able to carry on for a second year...*

"I couldn't afford it, simple as that, and [Berklee tutor] Gary Chaffee told me that I needed to move to New York and get a gig. And that's exactly what I was poised to do but, at the last second, I ended up going to California instead. A couple of my friends in LA had offered me a place to crash, so I got on a bus with my drums, a suitcase and \$80 dollars. I guess you're happy to do that stuff when you are 21, and all I could think about was getting a cool gig playing music that I loved."

*How did you land an audition with Zappa?*

"I'd met Tom Fowler - who used to play bass with Frank - at this little club in Venice where I was playing for \$5 a night, or beer! He told me that Zappa was looking for a new rhythm section and gave me a number to call. It's ironic, because I had just started listening to Frank's stuff again and was loving the live records *Zappa In New York* and *Roxy & Elsewhere*... I called the number and they told me to go away, but I kept at it. At the time I was staying with a friend, probably pre-answering machines, and I just happened to be in when the phone rang one day. It was management, telling me to be at The Culver Studios at 6pm on Wednesday night..."

"Culver was a big movie studio and when I arrived, there were three lines of people, a hundred deep, for each instrument. Each guy would go up on stage and only last about 15 seconds before you'd hear Frank go, 'Next!' When my turn came, I knew that it was time to sink or swim... I sat down and Frank started reading out a laundry list of things he wanted me to do: 'Play a groove... solo... play in 21... now I'm going to test your phrase retention, so repeat this after me...' The orders came thick and fast, but I remember thinking at one point that I must have been up there for longer than 15 seconds, so that was good! Afterwards Frank pulled me to one side and then his manager came over and told

me that they wanted to hire me. My first thought was great, I've got a gig, now I can get my own apartment!"

*As a musician he must have challenged you...*

"He did - it was a whirlwind. We'd rehearse for two months, for eight-and-a-half hours a day, and during those rehearsals he would change things all the time and just expect us to remember all the different versions. Sometimes we'd do one show a night, sometimes two, and we always did long soundchecks before them - even though the shows themselves could be up to two-and-a-half hours long, complete with drum solos and the works. It was gruelling, but I was young and I embraced it all. We'd carry around these folders of music too, composed note by note, and during a gig Frank would randomly turn round and shout out the number of the one that he wanted us to play. We'd all be scrabbling around in the half-dark, trying to find the right bit of music to sight-read, knowing that we'd better get it right... Frank would give us hand signals for time signature changes, numerical or stylistic shifts and, if he wanted a solo, he'd just turn round and point at you. It was pretty demanding!"

*After three years with Frank, you left to pursue your dream of becoming a session drummer.*

"I'd always wanted to do sessions but I'd get off the road with Frank and play clubs, but I couldn't get arrested when it came to studio work. When the offer to do those [sessions] came along I felt that if I didn't grab the opportunity, I might miss my chance altogether. Frank understood and that's how it all started... After those first two records someone else called and then I started working with Tom Scott, who recommended me to someone else. It just slowly built up during the '80s until I was doing up to three or four sessions a day."

*How did you approach the quantity, and the variety, of sessions you were doing?*

"Your mind starts to work in a way that puts your skill set and creativity into action immediately. You are there to serve the music, so you go through the possibilities of what is appropriate - trusting your gut, because that's what you are trained to do. It's about being professional and being able to switch yourself 'on' and 'off', because there is no time for indecisiveness." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Sting, Herbie Hancock, Frank Zappa, Jeff Beck

### CLASSIC CUTS: Frank

Zappa *Joe's Garage* (1979),

*Frank Zappa Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar* (1981),

*Sting Ten Summoner's Tales* (1993)





# Mitch Mitchell

As part of the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Mitch Mitchell's explosive style and musical, jazz-tinged playing made him one of rock drumming's all-time greats

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**H**e'd already gained a reputation as a fine session player on the London scene when John 'Mitch' Mitchell was called to help out an unknown American guitarist, who former Animals' bass player Chas Chandler had brought to London from New York in September 1966.

As Jimi Hendrix's manager, Chas set about finding his protégé a backing band and hired bass guitarist Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell. The eager drummer made such an impact that he soon became an integral part of the Hendrix sound. His playing inspired Jimi and vice versa as Mitch responded to the trio's heady freedom. Mitch's insistent but responsive attack was crucial to the success of such Hendrix hits as 'Hey Joe', 'Fire', 'Purple Haze' and 'The Wind Cries Mary'. Their interaction galvanised their live gigs and fuelled the groundbreaking albums *Are You Experienced?*, *Axis: Bold As Love* and *Electric Ladyland*.

The exotic and flamboyant Hendrix dominated the stage with his brilliant playing and explosive stage act while Mitch unleashed his own drumming revolution – as he crouched over his kit and poured heart and soul into every performance. During their few exciting years together Mitch and Noel helped Jimi make history.

## EARLY TALENTS

Born on July, 1947 in Ealing, London, Mitch's talents were recognised as a child and his parents enrolled him in drama school at the age of 10. He learned to act and dance and appeared in many TV commercials. At 12 he played Jennings in the popular children's stories *Jennings At School* and was perfectly cast as Wendover the impish schoolboy in the BBC series *Whack-O*. As a teenager, music became more important and Mitch couldn't resist the spectacle of a new kit on display in his local music shop, owned by Jim Marshall of Marshall amplifiers fame. Mitch became Jim's shop boy and later on Jim would teach him to play the drums.

He began playing with local bands, through contacts with musicians visiting Jim's shop. Much in demand for sessions, the teenager played with Screaming Lord Sutch and Johnny Kidd And The Pirates while still attending drama school. He was considered a pro by the time he joined r'n'b band The Riot Squad in 1965, and played on demo discs and pop sessions such as the Ivy League's 'Funny How Love Can Be'. Producer Denny Cordell recommended Mitch to Georgie Fame who was looking for a new drummer to join The Blue Flames. Mitch proved adept at soul standards and made his album debut on *Sweet Thing* in 1966. He had listened to r'n'b drummer Earl Palmer but during his time with The Blue Flames also heard about Max Roach, Elvin Jones and Philly Joe Jones. Although he coped with the endless one-nighters, it wasn't an easy gig and Fame's management abruptly fired the entire band.

When the call came from Chas Chandler, Mitch met a shy Jimi Hendrix, jammed with him in a Soho basement and was thrilled at Hendrix's ability. Neither musician

had any set plan on what to play. When Jimi proposed playing 'In The Midnight Hour' Mitch protested that it had become a hackneyed tune. Mitch later recalled: "I said, 'We've got a new band, can't we do better than this?' Because of that I was branded by the management as 'The Troublemaker'." Chas Chandler considered employing Aynsley Dunbar instead, but when Aynsley demanded £30 a week, Mitch retained the hot seat for £20 a week. His insistence on not relying on standards encouraged Hendrix to develop his own material. Mitch, Jimi and Noel became close friends but Mitch and Jimi were closest on stage and in the studio. Mitch said later: "Jimi was a very funny man and certainly not the tragic figure certain people have made him out to be. He had a wonderful sense of humour. He was so receptive and taught me a lot."

## CREATING A BUZZ

Jimi's debut single 'Hey Joe', released in December 1966, soon entered the charts and the Experience began playing club dates for the press and London in-crowd. While the West End buzzed with the excitement, the 'shock of the new' didn't always reach the outer suburbs as Bill Bruford (Yes, King Crimson) remembers. He saw the Experience play at the Bromley Court Hotel in January 1967.

"There were about three men and a dog in the hotel bar as well as a clique of celebrities. It was a tiny room and the Hendrix Experience, equipped with full Marshall stacks, just let rip, to the evident displeasure of the locals. I sat at the bar while Hendrix was trying his best to break a Telecaster up against his Marshall stack amidst howling feedback. This old fellow with his back to the band turned round slowly and gave an awful look at the horrendous noise coming from the stage. I thought, 'Well, this guy Hendrix will never get anywhere.' But I remember Mitch already playing in that loose, Elvin Jones style. I thought, 'Well if this bugger can do Elvin like Hendrix, then I can do Max Roach with Yes.' A lot of Mitch's subtler playing was inaudible above the roaring Marshall stacks. But he was a real groundbreaker."

The freedom of the trio enabled Mitch to blend his influences in a way that complemented and suited Hendrix's renaissance style. Brisk rolls, triplets and crescendos were matched by pounding cowbell rhythms and funky backbeats as 'Purple Haze', 'Can You See Me', 'Third Stone From The Sun' and 'Manic Depression' took shape.

Over the next year the Experience conquered America, starting at the 1967 Monterey Festival. Despite their success, presenting rock hadn't developed into a fine art. When the group played London's Saville Theatre the sound broke down several times, feedback was endemic and a roadie had to shove a vocal mike on a boom stand inside Mitch's bass drum. It wasn't possible to hear the more subtle nuances that included using brushes. Jon Hiseman (Graham Bond, Colosseum)

was not impressed. "When I first saw Mitch live I thought he lacked power and didn't provide what Hendrix needed. Yet on the albums he came across fantastically well. In those days there weren't enough stage mics for the drummer. When Jimi and Noel started to stoke up the volume, Mitch's drums got lost."

During 1968, Hendrix released the double album *Electric Ladyland*, which included contributions by drummer Buddy Miles. Cracks were showing in the Experience. Exhausted by touring and growing uneasy at the demands of his explosive stage act, Hendrix underwent considerable strain and in December 1968, the Experience temporarily split. Mitch and Noel Redding returned to London from New York and in December Mitch was filmed drumming with The Dirty Macs – John Lennon, Eric Clapton and Keith Richards – in The Rolling Stones' *Rock And Roll Circus* movie.

## HIGH SPIRITS

In January 1969, Jimi, Mitch and Noel regrouped to guest on BBC TV's *Lulu* show. I met the band in the BBC bar where Jimi bought me a pint of lager. In fact he bought everyone in the bar a drink before heading for the dressing room. Here Mitch and Noel had fun dismantling the plumbing during one of their pranks. The high-spirited mood continued in the studio when Jimi stopped playing 'Hey Joe' and switched to an unrehearsed version of 'Sunshine Of Your Love' in tribute to the recently-split Cream. By June, Noel Redding had finally quit and was replaced by Billy Cox. In July 1969 Mitch also left for a while but returned to play with Jimi at the Newport Jazz Festival and then at the Woodstock Festival on 18 August, 1969.

In December 1969 Jimi enlisted Buddy Miles into the Band Of Gypsys. He was a solid rock drummer, but he never inspired Hendrix in the same way as Mitch. At their second performance at New York's Madison Square Garden, Hendrix said: "I'm sorry, we just can't get it together," and walked off stage. Jimi and Mitch were reunited again at the 1970 Isle Of Wight Festival, but tragically Jimi died in London on 18 September, aged 27, leaving Mitch and Noel devastated. For many years after, Mitch found it difficult to talk about past events or resume his career. Mitch sadly passed away in 2008, but will always be remembered as one of rock's greatest players. **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Jimi Hendrix, Georgie Fame

**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Jimi

Hendrix Experience *Are*

*You Experienced?*, The Jimi

Hendrix Experience *Axis: Bold As Love*, The Jimi Hendrix Experience *Electric Ladyland*





# Tre Cool

The kit-smashing punk powerhouse in Green Day has evolved with the band's music from playing brash three-chord punk rock to creating concept albums and Broadway musicals

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**G**reen Day started life as snotty, brash punks whose mastery of the three-chord trick made them the perfect antidote to the gloom of the heroin-saturated Seattle grunge scene. Their star appeared to be on the wane after 2000's *Warning* until their 2004 album *American Idiot* captured the disillusionment of an entire generation and transformed Green Day from punk rockers to concept album stadium monsters. *American Idiot* has now been adapted for the stage as a musical while the band expanded on the concept format with the three-act structure of follow-up, *21st Century Breakdown*.

*Things have come along way since Kerplunk – the songs are much more ambitious in scope. Is it harder to come up with new songs?*

"I think we're really good at recording now, we've learned so much over the years. I think we use our experience and that helps the process. We have loads of songs too. It's easier to come up with an idea but to actually wring it out and make the song as good as it can be, and make it make sense in what the band is trying to do, it's not become easy, but we're getting really good at it."

*Is it tough playing the new stuff live with the longer arrangements?*

"Our set in the States, we were playing up to three hours. It's literally like jumping on a treadmill, turning it on 20 and not getting off until three hours later. It's good, you get to have a nice workout at the same time as playing the show. I'm pretty knackered after."

*Has your configuration changed over the years?*

"Definitely, I used to play a five-piece with two rack toms on *Dookie*. Then on *Insomniac* I switched to the double floor tom thing because I was going through a John Bonham stage and I got stuck on that. It's comfortable for me. I've added things, different effects, like the china was new for *American Idiot*, I'd never used a china before. Now that's a permanent fixture and I've got a big crash-ride off to the right, that's new. I used to just play two crashes and a ride with the hats, obviously. It's a little stuff as I can have up there and still play all my stuff."

*Have you noticed any changes in your playing over time?*

"My tempo is a lot better and my groove and pocket are definitely a lot better. I think I'm a real natural-sounding drummer these days. I think that before I was a little quirky, herky-jerky, which is cool, it's got a vibe. I can still do that. When we play the old songs it's really fun because I get to bust out that style and do those floppy rolls and the machine guns and all that stuff. I think I'm a lot stronger physically now too, so it's gotten a bit easier to play. The kit I play is like driving a

semi-truck. You have to really hit them, you've got to own it. You can't pussyfoot around up there."

*Did you experiment with a lot of different snares in the studio?*

"Oh yeah, so much, especially for *21st Century Breakdown*. We used Butch Vig as producer and he's a drummer and our engineer Chris Dugan is a drummer. Mike Fasano is the drum tech who worked on it and he's a brilliant tuner. He's way better at tuning than I am and I'm pretty good. We would all go in and tweak different snares. All the sounds are from different snares, I'm not using the same snare more than once or twice on the record. There's a lot of aluminium, there's a titanium snare, a lot of metal, some wood."

*Did you pick the metal snares for their attack?*

"The different tempos of the songs, the different vibe of the songs, called for different sounds. I might like the ring a metal one would have on a certain song, or maybe I'd want a longer note on a slower tune, something really attacking so it makes your ears bleed on a faster one."

*What was the genesis of the musical?*

"*American Idiot* is a rock opera so that story lends itself to something more theatrical. Mike Mayer, the director of *Spring Awakening*, and Tom Holtz came to us and said, 'Look, we want to try to make this into a play.' About a year later, opening night, two standing ovations, good times."

*You guys have a knack of capturing the zeitgeist with your music. Do you sit down to discuss what concept a new album will have, or do you start writing and see what happens?*

"That will happen simultaneously. We're always communicating with each other, always talking. You get a song, talk about what the lyrics are, what it means and if it goes with any of the other songs. It's a long process. It's not as exciting as you would think. We don't waste time arguing, we'll try something and if it's awesome we'll know. If it's not, we'll move on."

*Do you think you'll make another Green Day album that's just a collection of songs or from hereon will everything have a concept?*

"Who knows? We're Green Day, we can do whatever we want. That's the good part about being Green Day. One of the worst things about it is we can never watch Green Day play, so that's where the musical comes in, it's kind of like seeing a Green Day show."

*Do you miss playing small, intimate shows?*

"We can play smaller shows. We can do anything we want, and we do. We started this tour in a 200-person club in San Francisco, the Independent, then we did another one at the DNA a couple of nights after. Then

we played the Fox Theatre, which is really small, in Oakland, and the Uptown which is 300. When we get the itch to do it, we do it. No one tells us what we can and can't do. Except for our girlfriends. It's a good thing to do after making a record to get back into playing live again."

*If you could sit in with any band outside Green Day, who would it be?*

"That's a difficult one. I'd have to say something like The Wailers or Pancho Sanchez – or maybe Shakira just so I could watch her dance from really close up."

*Do you practise drums at home?*

"Oh yeah, I actually have the first kit I ever played in my life that was my drum set in The Lookouts – I have that in my jam room. It's a '63 Ludwig Black Oyster Ringo kit. That was the first drumset I ever touched when I was just 11 years old. The drumset disappeared into the punk scene – a lot of different bands played it, it toured, it was covered with stickers and it somehow made its way back to me. I refurbished it. It's a beautiful kit – it sounds awesome. I have a big collection of vintage and not-so-vintage but interesting drums. I have the knob-tension Leedy & Ludwig kit, there are maybe two or three of those in the world. I've got a bunch of kick-ass Rogers with the Brockstein badge on them. The guy from Pro-Mark used to have a drum shop in Texas so he was selling the Rogers new back in the '60s and sticking his own emblem on them, kind of like what a car dealership would do, so those are super-collectible and they sound amazing. I've got a Mod Orange Ludwig kit, a couple of the Black Oyster ones, a bunch of cool Radio Kings, I've still got the *Dookie* and *Insomniac* kits. I've got all the drum kits I've ever used except for the ones I killed."

*Do you ever feel a twinge of guilt for destroying so many drums?*

"Nope. Not at all. The only things I ever felt bad about breaking, I accidentally broke Mike's bass and that was bad and another time I accidentally broke a Zildjian Noble and Cooley alloy 14"x6½" snare made out of the Zildjian metal. There are only a few hundred of those and I broke it in half on stage, I slammed it down like a football and snapped it. I spiked it. I regret that." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

**Green Day, Foxboro Hot Tubs**  
**CLASSIC CUTS:** Green Day, *Dookie* (1994), Green Day *Insomniac* (1995), Green Day *American Idiot* (2004)





# Clem Cattini

One of Johnny Kidd's Pirates at the height of their fame, Clem Cattini was also the leader of The Tornados and the UK's most renowned session drummer

WORDS: ALAN CLAYSON

**H**is name will remain synonymous with that of The Tornados, formed in 1961 as house band in console boffin Joe Meek's north London studio. They also sold millions in their own right with 'Telstar', the quintessential British instrumental. Yet Clem Cattini was also a top session drummer, playing on over 40 UK Number Ones.

His walk with destiny began in the 1950s as accompanist to the likes of Terry Dene, Marty Wilde and Billy Fury, most of them under the aegis of pop svengali Larry Parnes. However, his commercial discography started with Johnny Kidd And The Pirates. After their 'Shakin' All Over' magnum opus fell from the top of the charts, the going got erratic, but, after a stint with Colin Hicks, Tommy Steele's brother, Clem landed on his feet with The Tornados, the only serious challengers to The Shadows as the kingdom's boss instrumental unit.

He left the group in 1965 to become a freelance studio hireling. Moreover, the sharp-eyed would spy Clem on television and at prestigious residencies, beating the skins behind, say, Roy Orbison, The Everly Brothers or Engelbert Humperdinck. During one such season, the band included Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones, weeks prior to their founding of Led Zeppelin.

Clem became involved with supergroup Rumplestiltskin, but returned to being a self-styled "musical navy" for such disparate entertainers as Edison Lighthouse, Dana, Lou Reed, Renee And Renato, The Bay City Rollers, Mike Batt and recently Paul Weller.

## How did you become a drummer?

"Me and some mates went to see *Blackboard Jungle*, the film with 'Rock Around The Clock' in it. Afterwards, we decided to form a group for a laugh. I could play a bit of piano, but the guitarist, Terry Kennedy, said, 'Clem can play drums.' It was as random as that, but I must have had some rhythm in me."

## What caused you to go professional?

"I was working down the 21's coffee bar in Soho with what was now called Terry Kennedy's Rock'n'Rollers, and we were signed up for a nine-month tour, headlined by the comedian Max Wall. Afterwards, we were asked to back Terry Dene as The Dene Aces."

## You didn't earn much from 'Shakin' All Over'?

"Even though it knocked Cliff Richard's 'Please Don't Tease' from Number One, I only got EMI's set 1960 fee of £5 15s 0d."

## How did you enter Joe Meek's orbit?

"We came back very skint from working in Italy where Hicks was a star - and Alan rang to say he'd answered a wanted ad for a guitarist to do sessions for this guy called Joe Meek. He asked me to go along to the audition for moral support, but on arrival, he asked Joe if I could play along with him. When we finished, Joe asked if I would like a job as well."

## Tell us about the recording of 'Telstar'.

"We started it the morning after a Saturday night show during a summer season with Billy Fury in Great Yarmouth. As we were obliged to leave for that evening's performance, Geoff Goddard, a songwriter under Joe's wing, played the main melody line on a clavichord. It was completely transformed from what I'd first regarded as just a routine backing track. Even far later in the 1960s, it wasn't generally done to go into the control room to listen to what you'd just played - so when Joe sent me the finished article, I couldn't believe how great it was. I wish that 'Riding The Wind', written by George Bellamy, our rhythm guitarist, had been the UK follow-up to 'Telstar' like it had been in America. Instead, it was 'Globetrotter'. When I told Joe I didn't like it, all hell broke loose, and he threw a stool at me! It missed by inches and hit the spool-holder of this brand-new Ampex four-track tape recorder. I fled, and he hurled it down the stairs after me. Joe's chief problem was that he couldn't be wrong. He wouldn't listen or take advice. What he did was right, and that was the end of it. Yet he was a genius with sound - especially considering the primitive mono equipment he had. Even after nearly half a century, 'Telstar' doesn't sound dated."

## Why weren't The Tornados able to capitalise on 'Telstar' reaching the top in the USA?

"I didn't want to sign again with Larry Parnes. He insisted that if we went to the States, Billy Fury had to go too. What made it more galling was that there was an outfit from Texas who started calling themselves The Tornados and doing 'Telstar'. The Ventures issued a big-selling version as well. We did a Parnes tour of Britain with Billy, Marty Wilde, you name 'em. We were the only act on the bill with a chart-topping record, but we were only allowed one number!"

## When did you conclude the end was nigh for The Tornados?

"I was sitting in a dressing room somewhere with Stuart Taylor, the guitarist. The hall was empty, and that was the end of instrumental groups. Stuart told me he was quitting, and I told him I'd had enough too. Joe was livid. We parted on very bad terms."

## You presided over Division Two, a band assembled to accompany The Ivy League - three jobbing Denmark Street composers. Was this your entry into session work?

"Doing demos for them and the rest of the Denmark Street songwriters got my session career off the runway - because next I started getting calls asking if I'd drummed on such-and-such a demo, and could I do it again on the master? Few musicians I worked with then knew I'd been a Tornado as I never used to talk about it. It was an inferiority complex, I suppose. Nevertheless, it was a case of sink or swim. I had to

teach myself to read percussion music in a hurry. Yet at one of the first sessions I did at Abbey Road for George Martin, I was doing the usual rock'n'roll fills, and George said [*refined accent*], 'You there! Drummer! Keep that up! That's splendid!' People started booking me because they knew that I could just be given a basic part, and could make it up from there. I did so many sessions that I haven't a clue about most of the titles."

## Didn't the drummer of a famous group once hire you to take his place on a proposed solo instrumental single intended to project him as a sort of Sandy Nelson of the 1970s?

"I was wondering why there were so many drum breaks until somebody let it slip out. I told the producer that this was completely out of order - so I was paid off, and the record never came out."

## What became Led Zeppelin helped PJ Proby out on a 1968 album, *Three Week Hero*. You played on some of that when John Bonham was indisposed...

"In a roundabout way, I turned down the job with Led Zeppelin. I had a family by then, and thought - wrongly - that I'd found my niche as a session drummer. When they were being formed, Peter Grant, their manager, twice asked me out to lunch. As I was working three sessions a day, seven days a week, I hadn't much time, so I left it. Two years after Zeppelin had really made it big, I said to Peter, 'That lunch date - was it to do with...?' He just nodded."

## Could Rumplestiltskin have achieved the kind of success that Led Zeppelin did?

"That band was [*freelance producer*] Shel Talmy's idea - Alan Parker on guitar, Peter Lee Sterling as vocalist, Herbie Flowers on bass, Alan Hawkshaw on keys and myself. We had to use pseudonyms. Mine was 'Rupert Bear'. This was owing to a BBC rule at the time of not spinning a record if it was by session men after all that business with [*'60s group*] Love Affair confessing to the media that the singer was the only member of the group heard on their hits. The BBC still found out, and Rumplestiltskin faded away after one album." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Johnny Kidd And The Pirates, The Tornados, Billy Fury, Rumplestiltskin

### CLASSIC CUTS: Johnny

Kidd And The Pirates *The Best Of Johnny Kidd And The Pirates* (1979); The Tornados *Ridin' The Wind: The Anthology* (2008); Rumplestiltskin *Rumplestiltskin* (1970)





# Dave Grohl

The man responsible for the iconic drumming on Nirvana's *Nevermind*, Dave Grohl continues to be one of the world's most exciting, energetic and hard-hitting drummers

WORDS: SIMON BRAUND/RHYTHM

**N**one of it has happened yet. Eight albums fronting his own stadium-filling band, Foo Fighters - on guitar of all things. Then Crooked Vultures, a thrilling side project that will see him back behind the kit in a trio with Led Zep's John Paul Jones and Josh Homme of Queens Of The Stone Age (on whose brilliant *Songs For The Deaf* he will also put in a star turn on the kit). A reputation earned as the nicest man in rock over 20 years in the business. And of course, the most terrible tragedy that will shape his future career and prematurely end the band with whom he has made his name - the suicide of his friend and Nirvana bandmate Kurt Cobain.

Dave Grohl is now considered a titan of drums, one who has appeared several times in the pages of *Rhythm* and who constantly tops polls - even when he's mostly leaving the drumming to Foo's bandmate Taylor Hawkins. But back in 1993, he is a fresh-faced drummer in the world's most infamous grunge band, who have just released their third album *In Utero*. While *Nevermind* is fated to be the band's most lauded record, not least thanks to its defining drum sound and Dave's playing, in 1993 Dave reveals to *Rhythm* that he actually prefers *In Utero*, how he's just learned to tune drums and how he's sick of playing *that* song...

## RHYTHM MAGAZINE, DECEMBER 1993

"The record came out and people heard about it," says Dave Grohl on the subject of *Nevermind*. "Then the 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' video came out and people saw what we were doing - we were f\*\*king s\*\*t up and having fun. And I think that's pretty much what every kid in the world wants: to be able to feel like they're f\*\*king something up and getting away with it."

Grohl recounts their meteoric rise with ingenuous glee: "I think *Bleach* [Nirvana's pre-Grohl debut] sold 75,000 copies on Sub Pop, Mudhoney were the big sellers on Sub Pop at the time, and then we moved over to DGC. We recorded *Nevermind* and there was a big buzz in the industry, everybody started wondering, what is this Nirvana thing? We were happy to open up for Sonic Youth on tour for the next five years of our lives, and that's what we were expecting to happen. We thought it'll sell maybe 150,000 copies, and the record company thought the same. I think at first they pressed 100,000 copies, and those went in the first week. Then we were selling 150,000 copies a week and it got to a point where we just couldn't believe it any more. People were telling us this stuff and it was kind of funny, like winning some ridiculous contest that you never knew you'd entered and didn't care whether you won or lost.

"It was never our intention to become some huge rock phenomenon, and I think that that *not* being the goal sort of saved our ass; we just made this record and we put it out and we went on tour, we never imagined anything like this. When things slowed down and we came off tour, when we actually stopped and sat down, we couldn't believe it. We just thought,

'God, look what f\*\*kin' happened.'

"It was a record that people could put on and for 45 minutes could... *work it out*. Whatever they were p\*\*sed off about, they could scream along to it; if they were sad, maybe they could be uplifted... it really did strike a chord with people. I don't know why and I don't know what that chord was... It's like sitting on a surfboard and wondering what propels that board. Well, it's the wave. But what makes the wave? It's gravity and the Earth's rotation... But as far as you know, you get on this board and it takes you to the shore."

## NEVER MIND NEVERMIND

"There was never any concern with making an album that was better than *Nevermind*," Grohl adamantly claims. "We just wanted to do something that was different. Sure, if we had it would've sold like crazy, and it would've put us in huge arenas and we would be some huge rock band, but we hate repeating ourselves. The thing that keeps us moving is experimentation: we like being very noisy sometimes and we like being very quiet; we like being melodic and we like being a sledgehammer. There was never any pressure on us at all. We went in and we did it surprisingly quick. Chris [Novoselic, bass] and I had the basic tracks done in the first two days. In less than three days we recorded 15 songs, all of them were first takes. We weren't into making things perfect, we didn't want things as clean and nice as possible. We just felt the energy of a first take was so much more propelling than a second or third take. It's your first time in a studio playing a song and with the first take there's a lot of excitement and anxiety and weird feelings that come out."

Dave reveals that he prefers the Steve Albini-produced *In Utero* to *Nevermind* and revels in the fact it was perpetrated with less regard for finesse than its predecessor: "Working with Butch Vig on *Nevermind* there was a lot more attention paid to perfection, with this album there was none. I think it has a lot more character, there's a lot more flaws. It was pretty much go in and sing into a microphone, or go in and play the drums. It's what I said about experimentation, when we did *Nevermind* we had a month in the studio, but the basic tracks were done within the first three or four days. You know, we had three more weeks to f\*\*k with it, and a lot of the time that can ruin a record. But that was an experience for all of us, to spend a lot of time on something like that. With *In Utero* it was: just go in and bash it out. That was our experimentation: let's see how fast we can make a record."

Grohl is the sixth person to have laid claim to the Nirvana drum stool, but quickly proved himself the perfect man for the job.

"I think they needed someone who just played harder than anyone else and who didn't play a lot of fancy stuff," he reveals. Grohl is the most physically energetic drummer I've seen, but he admits he's never heard of *Rhythm* favourites like Vinnie Colaiuta...

"I swear to God I know nothing about drummers," he assures us. "If you were to mention some hardcore drummer I might know who they were, but I don't know anything about drums. I don't read music, I never really had lessons - I took two jazz lessons one time and realised I was better off not knowing what I was doing. I try to keep it like that, as long as I can beat 'em up pretty bad. It feels good to play hard. I'd rather hit something with two hands than one; I'd rather see the drums shaking after I've hit them rather than just sitting there like a... a couch! It feels really good when you beat the s\*\*t out of them, it feels good inside. It's like when you're having sex and you're doing it for the sake of it. I mean, how *lame*. But when you're having sex and you're so into it that you're about to blow up at any minute, that's kind of what it feels like with the drums... that was stupid... But you can feel it in your stomach, when everything is going great and you know that's what it's all about. The only thing I pay attention to is not being too busy and hitting little six-inch splash cymbals, I'm not into that. I'd rather have something that's going to blow your hair back when you hit it."

"I wouldn't want to play in front of people without my band," he says when asked if he'd ever consider playing drum clinics. "It wouldn't be any fun just doing it myself. I think people would get a headache and leave. I mean, I'm totally convinced that anyone could play what I play. It's no big deal, it's not that difficult. Because the thing that I do, a lot of it is bonehead stuff, you know? It's like caveman drums, anybody could do it... as long as they drank enough coffee."

Nirvana are on the eve of their first American tour in two years - is Dave looking forward to it?

"It's going to be great! I got a drum tech who doesn't know how to tune drums. I got him because I've known him since I was three. In the past week I've been showing him how to set things up. I had to go to a music store today to learn how to tune drums! And it was really simple, now I have to tell my drum tech. But yeah, I'm totally excited to go. At least we don't have to play all the songs off *Nevermind* now for the rest of our lives. That was such a relief when we recorded *In Utero*, knowing we didn't have to play that f\*\*kin' 'Teen Spirit' song every night." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Nirvana, Them Crooked Vultures, Queens Of The Stone Age, Foo Fighters

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Nirvana *Nevermind* (1991), Nirvana *In Utero* (1993), Queens Of The Stone Age *Songs For The Deaf* (2002), Them Crooked Vultures *Them Crooked Vultures* (2009)







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# Steve Smith

From powering the stadium rock with Journey in the 1980s to becoming one of the world's finest jazz drummers, Steve Smith continues to evolve as a player

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

Steve Smith is unique in the drum world. One of the most brilliant jazz drummers alive, he also has under his belt a 10-million selling album from his time with '80s rock band Journey. As a child of the '60s, blending rock with jazz came naturally, and early in his career his detour into rock stardom met with massive success. Since then he's never looked back, moving seamlessly from Journey to jazz superstars Steps Ahead and leading his own band Vital Information. The latter continues to evolve after more than a quarter of a century and 12 albums.

During the 1990s Steve developed a parallel career with Tone Center Records, devising, producing and playing on albums with the likes of Scott Henderson, Larry Coryell and Jerry Goodman. As a lifelong Buddy Rich aficionado, Steve also corralled Rich band alumni in Buddy's Buddies, a blazing quintet, casting new light on many of Buddy's big band hits. Buddies has now morphed into Jazz Legacy, dedicated to honouring other great drummers from jazz history with sharp new compositions.

Steve's own style owes much to Tony Williams, Jack DeJohnette and Narada Michael Walden, and his continual quest for new horizons has led to an ongoing study of Indian rhythms. In recent years, Steve has been playing alongside tabla master Zakir Hussain and stunning fans with his own live konnakol vocalising while playing drum kit, as captured on Vital Information's 2007 platter, *Vitalization*.

## Do you come from a musical family?

"No, my grandfather and father were in the newspaper business, editors of The Brockton Enterprise, 20 miles south of Boston. When I was nine they found me a local teacher - Bill Flanagan, a big band drummer - and I started with just a practice pad for two years. I was at the cusp, still part of the old way of learning, which was very thorough and set me up to be a versatile professional. But around that time, because of The Beatles' success, many drummers bypassed what I did and simply bought drumsets. Within a year they'd have a band. To become a professional the bar was lowered. You no longer had to read and play with older musicians. The next generation - my own generation - only played with their peers. And they can't really give you constructive, realistic feedback."

## So youth took over in a big way?

"Yeah, at high school I was the drummer in a local college big band. In 1972 I went to Berklee. I continued big band, though the main focus was small group jazz: Miles Davis and Tony Williams, John Coltrane and Elvin Jones. And culturally, jazz musicians were playing with a rock approach. We didn't think of it as 'fusion'; we just thought, 'This is what jazz musicians are doing now.' It was Billy Cobham and Tony Williams. I identified with that. Playing jazz with a rock feel, sound and attitude came naturally because all young people played rock."



## You joined a golden generation at Berklee.

"My mates were Vinnie Colaiuta, Kenwood Dennard, John Robinson, Neil Stubenhaus, Mike Stern, Bill Frisell."

## And then you left Berklee to join Jean-Luc Ponty, the ex-Frank Zappa violinist?

"Right, in 1976. Mark Craney had just recorded *Imaginary Voyage* and quit to play with Tommy Bolin. Ponty auditioned drummers in LA and then New York. It was a cattle call."

## Did you have to read?

"Yes, and that was a big reason I got it. The other guys mostly didn't read. At that time my reading was at a real high, I'd done a lot of odd time signatures, studying with Gary Chaffee. Jean-Luc insisted on the reading because four days later we were on tour. That was when I really got turned on to rock drumming. After Ponty, in 1978, I moved to LA and auditioned for [hard-bop trumpeter] Freddie Hubbard, and the same week for Ronnie Montrose, and got both gigs. Radically different. For a 22-year-old kid, Montrose was more interesting, playing Jeff Beck-type instrumental rock. We opened for Journey for three months, with Van Halen also, on their first tour. I got to know everyone, and Journey asked me to join in September 1978."

## Did you see Journey as a stepping stone?

"I wasn't thinking that far ahead. I was following the opportunities that came along. But I loved learning how to play that music. It caused me to open up my drumming, leave lots of air between notes, even imagining the reverb that would be on the drums. I was used to instrumental music, responding to soloists in the moment rather than creating drum parts that were part of the composition. We were a real band, we wrote

the songs together. Everything started as a jam and developed into songs."

## Did you get songwriting royalties?

"We were very fair, we split the publishing, even though technically they don't copyright drum and bass parts. I did seven years with Journey and throughout that time I was still playing jazz with [Vital Information keyboardist] Tom Coster. He had a band with Randy Jackson on bass."

## Randy the TV star?

"Yeah, the *American Idol* judge, a fantastic bass player. I left Journey in '85 and by then I'd already recorded two Vital Information albums. Not to diminish the Journey experience - I was very into it and gave 100 percent - but I still had the desire to play jazz. Journey had a huge impact on my career because it helped me realise how to have a career, not just be waiting for the phone to ring. It helped me figure out how to make things happen."

## And gain the confidence to be a leader?

"Yeah, that's a gradual process, because I was used to being a team player and that, for me, is still the most comfortable. I'm more from the Art Blakey/Buddy Rich school, organising good musicians and allowing the situation to be a platform for everybody."

## Vital Information was your idea, though?

"Right from the beginning. But I've always surrounded myself with strong musicians and composers - I can come up with drum parts that are strong enough to suggest, 'Here's an 'A' section and 'B' section, now you come up with the rest.'"

## There's a great tradition of drummer leaders in jazz, from Chick Webb to Tony Williams...

"But they mostly have a difficult time. It doesn't really pay! Most of them have to play with other people occasionally to fill the coffers. As drummer band leaders we're at the bottom. Sax players, singers, guitarists... maybe the only ones lower are bass players! No drummer band leader died rich, I'll tell you that!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Journey, Steps Ahead, Jazz Legacy, Vital Information

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Journey *Escape* (1981), Steps Ahead

*Live In Tokyo* (1986), Scott Henderson, Steve Smith & Victor Wooten *Vital Tech Tones 1/2* (1998-2000)

# Sheila E

She may have entered mainstream pop consciousness with a couple of stylish singles and as sidekick to Prince, but Sheila E had already made her mark as a super-talented percussionist

WORDS: LOUISE KING

**B**orn in Oakland, California on 12 December 1957, Sheila E, as she is now best known, is the eldest child of world-renowned conguero Pete Escovedo. Her two brothers, Juan and Peter Michael have also followed their father into the music business, and it's pretty safe to say that in the world of drums and percussion, the name Escovedo looms very large indeed.

*Your father, Pete, was obviously a major influence on your style of playing, but is it true that in the early days he was reluctant for you to follow him into the music business?*

"Yes. He never sat down to teach us to play, because he never wanted us to become musicians - he was concerned about the nature of the industry. So I just used to watch him play - whether he was practising by himself or rehearsing with his band. I became his mirror image; what he played with his right hand, I'd play with my left. His drums were set up for a right-handed player, but when I played them, I'd play left-handed but on the right-handed set up."

*How did your playing progress from there?*

"When I was 14, a local band called me up asking if I'd like to join them - they'd heard that my dad was playing with Santana, and thought that I'd be good because their band sounded a bit like them. At this stage I never really played drums at all, but I told them I could play, and borrowed my cousin's drumset. I didn't really think twice about it, and I started with them right away."

"Then I played percussion in the group. There were two of us on congas, and the other guy became my boyfriend, so we jammed together a lot. I learnt so much listening to him, but when we were doing gigs, I'd play rhythms that he'd never heard me play before. I had no idea where they were coming from, but I think it must have been from my dad - after listening to him for years I'd stored all that stuff in my head. I actually only stayed with the band a couple of months, because by then I'd surpassed them musically and needed a new challenge."

*In addition to your father, which other musicians had a big influence on your playing?*

"Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, Miles Davis, Eddie Palmieri, Dizzy Gillespie and everyone from the Motown movement."

*So when did you actually make a conscious decision to pursue a career in music?*

"When I was 15, my dad needed a percussion player because his was sick. The band were due to play a big show in San Francisco to 3,000 people, and I finally convinced him to let me do it; he didn't want me to. I knew all the songs because the guys rehearsed in our house everyday. When we were on stage he told me to take a solo. I didn't really know what a solo was, but I

just started playing and by the end of it I got a standing ovation. I was overwhelmed and started to cry. It was really amazing - I had never felt anything like that in my life, and even my dad was freaking out. That's when I knew, and I went up to him and said, 'This is what I want to do for the rest of my life.' Up until that point my ambition had been to go to the Olympics, because I was running track and breaking a lot of records at high school. In fact, getting on stage with my dad that night basically changed my whole life."

*Billy Cobham produced the first two records you and your father recorded together. How did that all come about?*

"We were playing at a club in San Francisco and Billy came to see us. He walked up afterwards and just said, 'Wow, let's do a record.' He said he'd call us, and we didn't believe him, of course, but he did. By the time we did the second record, Billy had a band with George Duke, and my dad and I played some shows with them. George told me that he would take me on tour with him, so he asked my dad's permission, which I thought was kind of a cute thing to do."

*As a professional female musician, did you ever experience any prejudice?*

"When I went in to do a session, a lot of male drummers would say nasty things, or they would talk about me behind my back. They'd also have bets about who'd 'get' me first. It was very weird, because to me playing the drums was normal - it was like brushing my teeth. I didn't realise until I was outside of my family that it wasn't so normal. I couldn't understand why so many male drummers were being rude, until my dad explained to me that they were jealous."

*How old were you when you first went on tour?*

"Professionally, 15, when I joined my dad's band. My first trip was to South America, and we ended up having to pay our way out. There were drugs going round - I didn't know anything about that stuff - but it was a time when people were wearing high platforms. While we were there my dad and I bought loads of shoes, and when we came to leave the country we were accused of smuggling drugs inside them. The security people ended up taking our shoes apart, pulling a gun on me and threatening to strip-search me. I was absolutely horrified."

*Were you still at school at this time?*

"No, I left school - I didn't feel that they were teaching me what I needed to know to survive in the world. Now I do a lot of charity work with kids, though, and the main advice I give them is to go and get an education. The kids today are going to become who we are now; they're going to control our world, and we should encourage them to learn. I raise money for kids to learn the arts - all aspects, whether it's music, visual art or

dancing. If they're going to go into music, I stress that it has to be in their heart - too many see it as a quick way to make a dollar, become famous and ride in a limousine. You have to think of it as a business primarily; there are so many musicians who have been around for 40 years and don't have a dollar. The business can really eat you up if you let it."

*Your involvement with Prince gave you an incredibly high profile. How did you first meet?*

"In 1978, when I went to see him play in San Francisco. I'd heard so much about him, and I was overwhelmed. He was so young, yet he was writing and composing his own music, and arranging and performing his own material. I went backstage to introduce myself and he told me he knew who I was. Apparently he'd been following my career for a while and had seen me perform. He asked how much I made and when I told him, he said he'd never be able to afford me! But from that day we exchanged numbers and became friends. He'd come visit me all the time, and then things did change..."

*What was working with him like?*

"It was a wonderful experience. It was hard work but he took me to a whole new level of music. We were pushing each other all the time, and we'd stay in the studio for days because we were having so much fun. I was one of the few people who was able to hang with him, you know. Musically, I was able to go where Prince was going and take him a step further too, and he loved the fact that I was a woman. The rules of business didn't matter to him, and that's why he sounded like he did. Everyone at that time wanted the cleanest sound possible, but he wanted the full sound. He never took anything away that would make the music sound too clean that it didn't have any life."

*Is performing live still what it's really all about?*

"You give and give when you perform, and it's wonderful to get a response from a crowd because you know that they like what you've done. When you work hard, it's a wonderful feeling to have people acknowledge it." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Prince, Pete Escovedo, Ringo Starr, George Duke, Billy Cobham

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Prince *Sign O' The Times* (1987), Sheila E *The Glamorous Life* (1984), Pete & Sheila Escovedo *Solo Two* (1977), Billy Cobham *Inner Conflicts* (1978)







# Jack DeJohnette

He's played on some of the most groundbreaking albums in jazz and was present at the birth of fusion. Now more than 50 years into his career, Jack continues to push the limits of music

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**H**is drumming runs like a current through fusion and post-bop jazz, covering five decades of music that defied convention and the limits of genre. Now in his seventies, DeJohnette continues to push boundaries with a fearless passion that never stops attracting new musical partners to produce daring collaborations, covering everything from new age music to electronica and acoustic jazz. *Rhythm* met Jack in 2008.

Born in Chicago in 1942, DeJohnette began taking piano lessons at the age of four and stuck with the instrument for 10 years before fate lent a hand.

"My uncle was a jazz DJ," remembers DeJohnette, "and a drummer left his drums in my basement, and I went down and played them. I used to mess around with them when the drummer would come to the house and I found I had a natural affinity with them so I was able to play them quite naturally – better than I played the piano, actually."

DeJohnette struck out into the Chicago music scene, working as both a drummer and a pianist, taking any and every gig that came along. "I worked with blues bands, I worked bar mitzvahs, I did all kinds of stuff; solo piano and drums too. I had a very diverse musical apprenticeship because there was a lot of music going on in Chicago," he remembers.

After DeJohnette moved to New York in the 1960s, his career took off and he has since amassed an imposing discography that includes John Coltrane, Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock and several sessions with Miles Davis, including the seminal *Bitches Brew*, the album often credited as marking the birth of fusion.

An expressive player and inventive improviser, DeJohnette continues to explore new avenues as a musician. When *Rhythm* interviewed Jack in 2008, he was working on an album of re-mixes with Ben Surman. "It's all music, man," says DeJohnette. "It's all happening, it's all relevant."

**You're famous for your broad musical sensibility. Would you say that's primarily down to playing piano?**

"Oh yeah, I think that any melodic instrument is a definite help, whether on the percussion side, vibes and marimba, or the guitar or the piano. They are all part of the percussion family. People always talk about piano and drums as though they are separate entities, but they are all part of the same family. It's about tonality, too – the drums are tuneable, you tune them to certain pitches, so the drums are most definitely a very musical instrument."

**What took you from Chicago to New York?**

"The music scene had dried up a little bit and I had exhausted all the places there were to play so there was nowhere else to go but to Mecca, so I went to New York. Coltrane was there, Miles was there – everybody was based in New York. Some of the great places were

still going at the time – Small's, Count Basie's – and I caught the tail end of Birdland. I think it closed a year after I got there so I got a chance to see some of the great legends, sit in and play with some of them."

**You joined Miles Davis's band after Tony Williams. Was that an intimidating prospect?**

"Not really. I had replaced Tony Williams before and I'd been playing with Miles before that. It wasn't a new job for me. I was well equipped to take over that position."

**When you cut *Bitches Brew*, did you know it would have such an impact?**

"No, I knew it was important but historically the same could be said of *Kind Of Blue*. It was a session with Miles, everybody went in to make a record and it turned out to be this groundbreaking album that still continues to sell to this day."

**What keeps you excited about music after so many years?**

"I don't love travelling as much as I used to but I still love playing the music with the same if not more of a passion than I've had for the last 40 years. I surround myself with great musicians who are broad-minded. We challenge and inspire each other to come up with a great standard of musical interplay."

**You seem comfortable playing everything from acoustic jazz to electronic music...**

"Well, I've always been eclectic anyway. I've always liked using acoustics and electronics in creative ways. It's like a painter with a palette, there are different types of material to work with, acrylics, oils, watercolours – it's the same thing. I have an electronic unit that fits into my drums, it's called HPD-15 HandSonic, made by Roland. I can make sequences or, when Ben Surman and I have our electronic thing, the Ripple Effect, I use it in real time. I can play things on the spur of the moment, I can change the programs pretty fast. It's very user-friendly."

**Tell us about your recent tour with legends Bobby McFerrin and Chick Corea...**

"We just improvise. Bobby may play drums, I'll play piano, they dance, they sing, they go out in the audience. It's always open. You never know. We never rehearse. We do a soundcheck and that's it. I love doing that. I'm at home. There's nothing to be afraid of if you know how to create form and motion, you'll make it up in real time and create the composition as you go."

**Several of the performers you've worked with, including Lee Morgan, Chet Baker and John Coltrane, struggled with drug addiction. Was that a big part of the jazz scene at the time?**

"People had to deal with it one way or the other. A lot of times it didn't affect their musical ability. It

didn't affect Bird's ability to keep a job. When he got on the stand he played his butt off, which was quite amazing and why so many people got hooked on it, because some of these people were able to function while they were high. Nowadays I don't think that's such a big thing. Most musicians are pretty clean-cut."

**Do you have to make a conscious switch between being a bandleader and being a session player?**

"Only in the sense that I have to direct and pick out the pieces but, as far as improvising and playing with people, the whole point of it is to have a high level of interaction and interplay, so from that point of view it's kind of the same. Sometimes I have to direct, sometimes the direction is passed around among the players. I'm very much into interplay."

**What is there left for you to accomplish as a drummer?**

"I think about it less as a drummer than as a well rounded musician; as a composer, as a collaborator, as a leader. I'd like to keep expanding musical creativity with like-minded musicians, younger musicians, doing these projects. I have a Latin project with Luisito Quintero and Giovanni Hidalgo; I'd like to get the Intercontinental band out there; I'd like to set up a foundation where I can help musicians get more established, or study music or get instruments, so those are some ideas."

**And what are you listening to at the moment?**

"I've been listening to Herbie Hancock's album *The Joni Letters*, especially Tina Turner's track on there, which I like a lot. I've been listening to Jeff 'Tain' Watts' album. I like Jeff's playing and his writing, he's a very talented guy. There's an amazing South African singer who I've had the pleasure of working with named Sibongile Khumalo. She's a South African classical singer and she also sings pop and jazz, improvised in an African sense. Through John Cummings at Serious we've put together a special band that includes Jason Yarde, Bryon Wallen, Jerome Harris and Danilo Perez. We did some dates in England and Europe and we did the Cape Town Jazz Festival in South Africa." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Miles Davis, Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette Group

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Miles Davis *Bitches Brew* (1969), Sonny Rollins *Next Album* (1972), Keith Jarrett *Trio Standards Volume 1* (1983)





# Neil Peart

After almost 40 years with Rush, prog drumming legend Neil Peart is still one of rock's most phenomenal and revered players

WORDS: DAVID WEST

Since he joined Rush back in 1975, Neil Peart has been the poster boy for prog – disciplined, metronomic and powerful. Nearly 40 years on and he and the world's foremost power trio are still pushing themselves and breaking new ground.

Neil's first role model for drumming excellence was Gene Krupa, and at 13 Neil convinced his parents to let him take lessons, but he had to wait to play real drums.

"My parents gave me lessons, sticks and a pad," he says. "They said, 'If you do this and practise every week for a year then you get drums.' That's still what I tell parents. Get [your kids] sticks and a practice pad and lessons and if they do it for a year then they're serious, then get them drums. A lot of them look at it like a toy these days. I've talked to parents who've said, 'I don't want them to get that serious, it's just for a toy.' I'm like, 'A drumset – a TOY?!' It's hard not to get irate about that because it's been the focus of my life."

## What were the challenges you faced early on in your development?

"While I was playing along with records, all the frustrations were tempo things – getting excited when you play a fill and then getting tired after. I always joke about this with young drummers. They get excited and speed up when they play a fill and then they get tired and slow down. It's so natural, right? And it's a lifelong pursuit to develop good time. I'm talking about spanning four decades for me, first of all just trying to play the tempos like the records, then being in the studios and having to deal with click tracks and sequencers from the late-'70s and playing in mathematical time. I learned a lot about the click track, how you can make it breathe. It doesn't have to be a mechanically-driven clock at all, it's a guide. You can push and pull an amazing amount on those tiny increments of click pulses. But that led me into a trap by the mid-'90s with sequencers and click tracks that I felt were metronomic in the bad sense, I was starting to feel stiff and that's when I studied with [jazz instructor] Freddie Gruber because I saw Steve Smith play. In the mid-'80s we worked together on a Jeff Berlin record so I'd seen Steve play and knew that he was great, but when we were doing the Buddy Rich tribute, he came in to set up and just started playing. I said, 'What happened to you?' It was so beautiful, so musical, so crisp and elegant. And he said, 'Freddie.'"

## You also studied with Peter Erskine...

"He helped me with that eloquence and time sense. I came in from studying with Freddie with a lot of physicality between beats. Peter had me start by playing quarter-note ride beats and I had this thing from Freddie where I was doing a little flick of the wrist in between. Peter points, 'What's that?' I knew he studied with Freddie so I was kind of confused, but I said, 'That's time-keeping.' He said, 'No.' He points to

his heart, 'Time-keeping is here. Own the time.' It was an evolution I was able to bridge. Now I feel that flick of the wrist between each beat. I practised for six months just on the hi-hat alone with Peter. There is a Roland device with Quiet Count, where you get two bars of click and two bars of silence so I started practising to that. I've heard from a lot of other drummers that it can make you mental, how hard that is. So every day I start with a slow tempo and a fast tempo with that approach – two bars of click, two bars silent, and try to come in on time. Especially with slow tempos it's so hard but so good, and I played nothing but hi-hat every day for six months. It never got boring because I was exploring and checking things out at the same time. I got tons of new ideas during these tempo exercises."

## So how have you applied this to Rush?

"I felt such a growth in time-sense – and that gives me more bravery in fills and in improvising that I can go so much farther outside now because it's almost given me a duality of thought lately that I can see what's happening and what ought to be happening. If there is a little train wreck among the three of us I can suddenly run on two tracks now. I can be playing what I know to be right but if one of the guys is half a bar out I can say, 'Okay, if I drop that half-bar, we'll all be together again.' Even sometimes if I make an error of execution that throws me off, I can still hear the time and that's 45 years of getting to that stage to be able to do that."

## Your live solos continue to evolve. How do you avoid getting stuck in a rut?

"Freddie had defined me as a composer. He said, 'Look, when you play, you're composing.' And I accepted, yes, I'm a compositional drummer and when I did the *Anatomy Of A Drum Solo* video I defined myself that way: 'I composed this solo and I play variations within the movements but this is a composed piece.' Then right after that I went, 'Well, I want to improvise. I don't want to be just a compositional drummer.' So I deliberately set out to learn that, within the context of my solo, making the first half of it improvisational over three different ostinatos, and then the second half was composed so I know it is always going to resolve into something from the audience's point of view."

"Pure improvisation, everybody knows, is inherently risky. I improvise within a framework but I've been able to take myself so far out of my former comfort zone with that kind of nurturing over time. Inevitably every improviser finds that you find something you like and you want to do it again the next night. It's hard not to – that really worked, it led into the other thing so great, and the audience loved it and all that – but to be true to the spirit of it you can't let yourself do that."

## Has your playing changed in other ways?

"My bandmates and I were talking the other night about how the time-sense we have now is different

from what we had before as a band. I feel it in myself, through working with those teachers and continuing to push myself in different directions. Being comfortable with improvisation has made me a better composing drummer, for that reason that I can hear those two things at once – what is and what might be. Now, when we're playing a song and something goes wrong, I can still hear what should be happening and then what is happening and compare and correct it. I'm sure that's how I've learned that, from forcing myself into that open, dangerous zone – every solo every night. Even with the newer songs we're working on I'm doing more and more of that. As we play them live there are fills I change every night. I never used to do that. It's a new frontier for me, and how wonderful after 45 years of playing, not only do I have new frontiers technically but the band comes with me on those, and through all of our stages that each of us has gone through musically we have all grown together like that."

## Is that what keeps you touring after so long?

"The real test of a musician is live performance. It's one thing to spend a long time learning how to play well in the studio but to do it in front of people is what keeps me coming back to touring, because I really don't like it but it's necessary. For me to call myself a musician it's necessary to play live and it rewards so much, not just in the pay sense but what it does for my playing. I feel it through a tour, I feel it at the end of a tour, all that I've gathered and especially now that I am improvising so much, all that I am exploring, all the new ideas I have. I try not to repeat myself in fills in all the Rush songs unless it is something very simple or something I feel is my own characteristic thing, then I'll repeat it, but otherwise I try not to as a matter of principle."

## How important is the respect of your peers?

"There is nothing I'd rather have than the respect of other musicians, but respect is something you have to earn continually. It's a responsibility. Like playing live, it's my responsibility to perform as musician. It's my responsibility to get better and if people are admiring the work I do then that's even more inspiration to improve and to take it up a notch and not repeat myself. The hunger for improvement and exploration really does derive from the acclaim. I know that people give me that respect so I feel I have to earn it." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Rush

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Rush *Hemispheres* (1978),

Rush *Moving Pictures* (1981),

Rush *Snakes And Arrows* (2007)







# Joseph 'Zigaboo' Modeliste

With his band The Meters, Ziggy Modeliste set the benchmark for funk drumming, in particular the New Orleans' second-line funk style

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**Z**igaboo Modeliste is one of the greatest ever exponents of the New Orleans second-line style of funk drumming, coming to prominence with seminal funk band The Meters. His syncopated beats have been sampled many times by hip-hop artists, and musicians such as Keith Richards, Robert Palmer and Dr John sought out Ziggy to play on their records.

*You were really displacing the beat all over the track 'People Say'...*

"Well at the time I was trying to do so much. Booker T and the MGs were the premier instrumental group on the record. It was simplicity and then they came across with a big over-driving melody and Al Jackson was like the transmission. I guess Art Neville, being a big fan of Booker T and me a big fan of Al Jackson, I thought if we were going to be competing with instrumentals we had to say something different."

*There's an almost brutal clarity to those late '60s recordings. Were they done on four or eight track?*

"My recollection is eight track. A couple might have been done on four to get the effect where you can hear everything. The recording was not that sophisticated but the sound was big because you didn't have many tracks. The more tracks you have, it takes away a lot of the meat and potatoes of the actual instruments."

*What drums did you play?*

"My first set was Rogers. Then I had Ludwig and Slingerland, I recorded with both in the '60s. I used a Speedking pedal. I don't know where I got the idea about tuning my snare drum really high. That was good to set up the contrast between the snare and the hi-hat - which were metal - and the bass drum, which I always tried to get the lowest frequency. So you could integrate all three and still have separation. It had been a clever engineer to get everything together."

*Most engineers, certainly by the early '70s, were taping everything down.*

"Everyone was recording dry with pillows in the bass drum and muffling the snare and tuning down a notch. But I always kept my Ludwig metal snare tuned high. I also used a Slingerland metal snare. And then I got a Gretsch set with chrome covering. Instead of using top toms I had timbales. So the whole set looked metal - the bass drum and 16" floor tom were wood but had chrome covering. But the Ludwig snare was a regular 14"x5" Supra-Phonic. I got a 42-strand snare and used fishing wire to keep it tight. The problem with Ludwig drums is if you hit them hard, the lugs loosen up."

*And you were playing all over the head?*

"Actually I was mostly aiming centre. A lot of people have said it sounds like you're playing on the edge, but

if I ever did that, it was by mistake because I was really aiming for the centre."

*Even with the ghost strokes?*

"Sometimes, the velocity of my licks would be one degree and other times something else. It had a lot to do with how you hit the drum - because of the music I didn't play too many tom fills. It was all about keeping a consistent groove - nobody going ahead, everybody moving together. I always thought support, support, support and it worked out well."

*So when did you start playing?*

"I can't remember the exact date. But when I was about 11, my parents got me a set and before that a parade drum. I was self-taught but I was really trying to play like the New Orleans drummers I saw when I was young. Ed Blackwell was one of the most celebrated. People I saw were like James Black, who wasn't my first choice but was a monster drummer."

*They all had fantastic feet like you.*

"They would just speak with the bass drum. Way before the double bass drum came out, these guys were phenomenal. My biggest idol was Joseph 'Smokey' Johnson. He had it all and he had this song called 'It Ain't My Fault' and all the drummers in town had to play that on the gig. It was something like 'Cissy Strut' became - one time I'd go anywhere and every band was playing 'Cissy Strut'."

"So I started out trying to do the same thing as he did with 'Ain't My Fault'. Smokey was playing with Fats Domino. Art Neville had a band called the Hawketts and Art hired me. But we were just kids - Cyril [Neville] and myself - and it got to the point where he had to have a *real* drummer, you know what I'm saying? And so he hired Smokey and, man, when I saw that man play - he was doing stuff I'm *still* trying to figure out."

"Another drummer equally famous who did all the early stuff round New Orleans was Charles 'Hungry' Williams. He was the cat, but I didn't get the chance to see him until much later and he was playing in the Angola State Penitentiary orchestra! He was the baddest cat, he could roll with one hand. And there's Idris Muhammad who worked with Curtis Mayfield and Roberta Flack. A whole bunch of great drummers came from New Orleans."

*Why is that?*

"Orleans is a small city, everybody was accessible and between downtown and uptown you could see all the cats. I was really young for clubs, I never did look older than my age, but I took a chance and snuck in. New Orleans, being a seaport, importing and exporting a lot of records, you got a chance to hear people not indigenous to that area. The Cuban influence, African-American, Creole, all kinds of different things were going on."

*The Meters started backing other artists before doing their own material...*

"That was the idea. Allen Toussaint saw us and wanted to record us. We'd played so long together, six nights a week, really tight, that they thought it was a good idea for us to back other artists. There were quite a few - Lee Dorsey, Betty Harris, Earl King, Allen Toussaint himself. Then we cut some instrumental singles and to our surprise, someone wanted to pick it up. We didn't have a name - we were pulling names out of a hat and The Meters came up. Sounded as good name as any."

*Some of your most famous tracks have crazy titles, for example 'Hey Pocky A-Way'.*

"'Hey Pocky' is when the Mardi Gras Indians go down the street on Mardi Gras day and bring the gang on down and they say if you ain't gonna party with us you gotta get out the way - 'Hey Pocky Away'."

*What about 'Look-Ka Py Py'?*

"The Meters were acting stupid on the road one day and I started singing rhythmic drum stuff and beating on the back car seat. Everybody had their part And Leo came singing - 'Look-Ka Py Py' and we all thought it was a joke and then we thought, 'Oh man, let's do a whole record like that with no instruments. 'Look-Ka Py Py' was just one of the phrases we made up."

*It seems The Meters ended just as you were getting wider recognition?*

"I hate to talk about it. Sometimes all good things must come to an end. We had a good run and in 1976 we decided we weren't going to do it anymore and then Art Neville started off with The Neville Brothers. But I think the real reason The Meters broke up was because of mismanagement. They never paid royalties and it kind of turned everyone off, certainly me."

*In the '80s when sampling came along, you were everywhere.*

"That turned out to be pretty good in some aspects and in other aspects pretty bad. The good side is it keeps your name going. Ironically, the songs that got the most sampling activity wouldn't have been my first choice. Songs we didn't even play live, like 'Handclapping Song' have been sampled a lot while 'Thinking's been sampled on a commercial for Nike."

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Meters, Keith Richards, Dr John

### CLASSIC CUTS: The

Meters *The Meters* (1969),

The Meters *Look-Ka Py Py* (1970)





# Jimmy 'The Rev' Sullivan

Spearheading the new wave of American metal, Avenged Sevenfold were driven by the super-heavy beats of the late metal drum genius known as The Rev

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

**A**s the drummer and creative force behind modern American metal heroes Avenged Sevenfold, Jimmy 'The Rev' Sullivan saw his band evolve from a rough and ready metalcore outfit to a polished purveyor of classic metal. Fortunately, the Rev had the chops to cover all of the band's musical bases. His fleetness of hand and foot earned him the admiration of both peers and fans, while in Avenged Sevenfold he had the perfect vehicle to showcase his talent. The drum break in 'Bat Country' is vintage Rev - sharp, punchy and always tied to the song while his unmistakable groove and inventiveness helped define the band's sound. By their eponymous fourth album, The Rev and Avenged Sevenfold were at the top of their game. The album entered the Billboard chart at Number 4 and broke the Top 30 in the UK.

Work had already begun on Avenged Sevenfold's fifth album when he was tragically found dead at his Huntington Beach, California home. He was just 28 years old. His demo'd beats were tracked by his hero Mike Portnoy for the band's fifth album, *Nightmare*. *Rhythm* met The Rev in 2007 ahead of the release of their fourth album.

## THE REVEREND THOLOMEW PLAGUE

"I'm prouder of the new album than of anything we've ever done!" the Rev, aka The Reverend Tholomew Plague, gabbles excitedly. "Dude, there are some songs which didn't make it onto there which have even crazier drumming than the stuff that's on there!"

Ask him about his drum kit, though, and he gets *really* excited. "The new kit is a DW in silver snakeskin, with seven toms, all floating," he begins. "I've got three kick drums - with an R, an E and a V on the third!"

Just one more and you'll be up there with Alex Van Halen, Jimmy.

"Ha ha, yeah! But I gotta figure out how to use 'em all. I'm only using two - the one with the V is just for show, although I do have a pedal hooked up to the third drum in case one of the other pedals breaks down."

The rest of the Rev's gear is equally impressive: "I use Evans heads, Pro-Mark sticks and Sabian cymbals. I use two chinas and two rides, so I can hit the ride bells with both hands while I'm doing the double bass, which sounds awesome. No triggers - it's all live, baby!"

Like Avenged Sevenfold's previous albums (two on indie labels and the third, the gazillion-selling *City Of Evil*, their debut release for Warner), the new self-titled album is a showcase for Sullivan's precise, powerful drumming, one part Pantera-style lockdown, one part Nicko McBrain and all parts heavy. How did he gain such enviable skills?

"Oh s\*\*t - I tried to take lessons when I was five!" he bumbles. "When I was a little boy I always wanted one of those toy drum kits, just to mess around with. Then at 10 I started taking lessons with a really good instructor, and I studied for five or six years. After that, I started playing in bands straight away."

It wasn't long before Sullivan was emulating the work of his drumming heroes. The list?

"Most definitely Vinnie Paul, Terry Bozzio, Vinnie Colaiuta, Neil Peart and Mike Portnoy," he says. "Vinnie was very creative, he did stuff with the double kick that no one had ever done before, doing rhythms with his feet instead of just his hands. Stuff like that, rather than just beating the f\*\*k out of the drums."

Warming to his theme, he adds, "Y'see, on double bass, speed is more of a muscle thing. I used to sit there with a pad and a metronome and a double-kick pedal, and just hammer it out every day and try to get faster and faster, little by little. I worked my ass off doing that. Hands are more about technique: once you've got the technique you can roll with it and the muscles will follow."

## MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST

Like many drummers who have reached a certain level of skill, Sullivan also plays other instruments. This helps him mesh with the other A7X bandmembers, specifically guitarists Synyster Gates and Zacky Vengeance - and when you're jamming with axemeisters of their calibre, you need to know what you're doing. Not that Jimmy is short of confidence.

As he puts it, "I'm alright at guitar. It helps rhythmically. I picked up piano pretty quickly too, because it's a rhythmical instrument - you're tapping on keys, it's not much different to drums. I write a lot of the guitar riffs myself, and me and Synyster Gates sit down and go over everything so we can lock in on it. Our bassist Johnny Christ likes to follow me: he plays very close attention to what I'm doing at all times."

This synergy enabled Avenged Sevenfold to dispense with the services of a producer and tweak knobs on the new album themselves, he explains: "We've got five guys here who are all best friends, and who all have a million different ideas for the songs and the different directions we could take them in. We bring fully-written songs to the table, and after that it's a matter of getting the tones we need, and working on harmonies and s\*\*t like that."

Isn't it useful to get a producer in for their outside perspective? "A good producer knows how to draw sounds out of you that you don't know how to get out of yourself, but we know how to get those sounds - so that's why we felt we didn't need one. I find a producer normally just tells you, 'Oh, this sucks!' and that kind of thing, and we don't need that s\*\*t!" Well, when he puts it like that...

Talking to Sullivan, you're reminded why it is that bands get into music in the first place: because they love playing songs. It's not because they enjoy the studio process ("F\*\*k, no! I get p\*\*sed off if I have to do more than three f\*\*kin' takes!") and it's definitely not about showing off - although when you ask the Rev about his limitations as a drummer, you sense that he feels pretty good about his skills. So, is there

anything he can't do? "Nope, nothing."

What about death metal blastbeats and gravity rolls?

"I can do anything!" he insists. "Death metal's really easy, it's more about stamina. Like, I can play the double bass as fast as any drummer in the world for 30 seconds or a minute, but don't expect me to do it all the way through a song! But what kind of song would that be anyway? It would just be noise."

Fair point. Avenged Sevenfold have built a reputation as a hard-fighting, hard-partying band who leave a trail of destruction wherever they go, but Sullivan is keen not to overplay this angle, insisting, "I never drink before a show. What's the point?" and coyly dropping hints: "We all have different indulgences which I will not disclose. We all hang out together, but we also do different things every night."

## BODY TALK

Sullivan keeps fit when he has to, although he slips into bad habits when he's off the road. "When I'm off the road I lounge around and do everything that's bad for me. I love touring; I hate being at home, it's boring. Half the week I'm out going to bars and clubs, and half the week I'm sitting watching movies. It's not a bad life, I guess - people always find things to complain about, but they're just being a bitch!"

"The band is my number one priority, it's all I've ever wanted to do. Me and Shadows [Matt, Avenged Sevenfold singer] and Gates and Johnny have known each other for ages, and then we met Zack at high school. I never expected anything or took anything for granted, I never counted on us getting big. It's a dream come true."

Have his drumming dreams come true as well, or does he have some way to go before he achieves his potential?

"Well, I heard a quote from some drummer - maybe it was Buddy Rich or some other cat from back in the day - and he said, 'Your feet should be able to do whatever your hands can do.' I would like to be able to reach that goal, because it always sounded impossible to me."

The Rev's final words?

"My advice for new drummers is to start young and study as long as you can. Eat your dinner off your snare drum and work your ass off - it's the only way to do it!" Here endeth the sermon. **R**

## ESSENTIALS

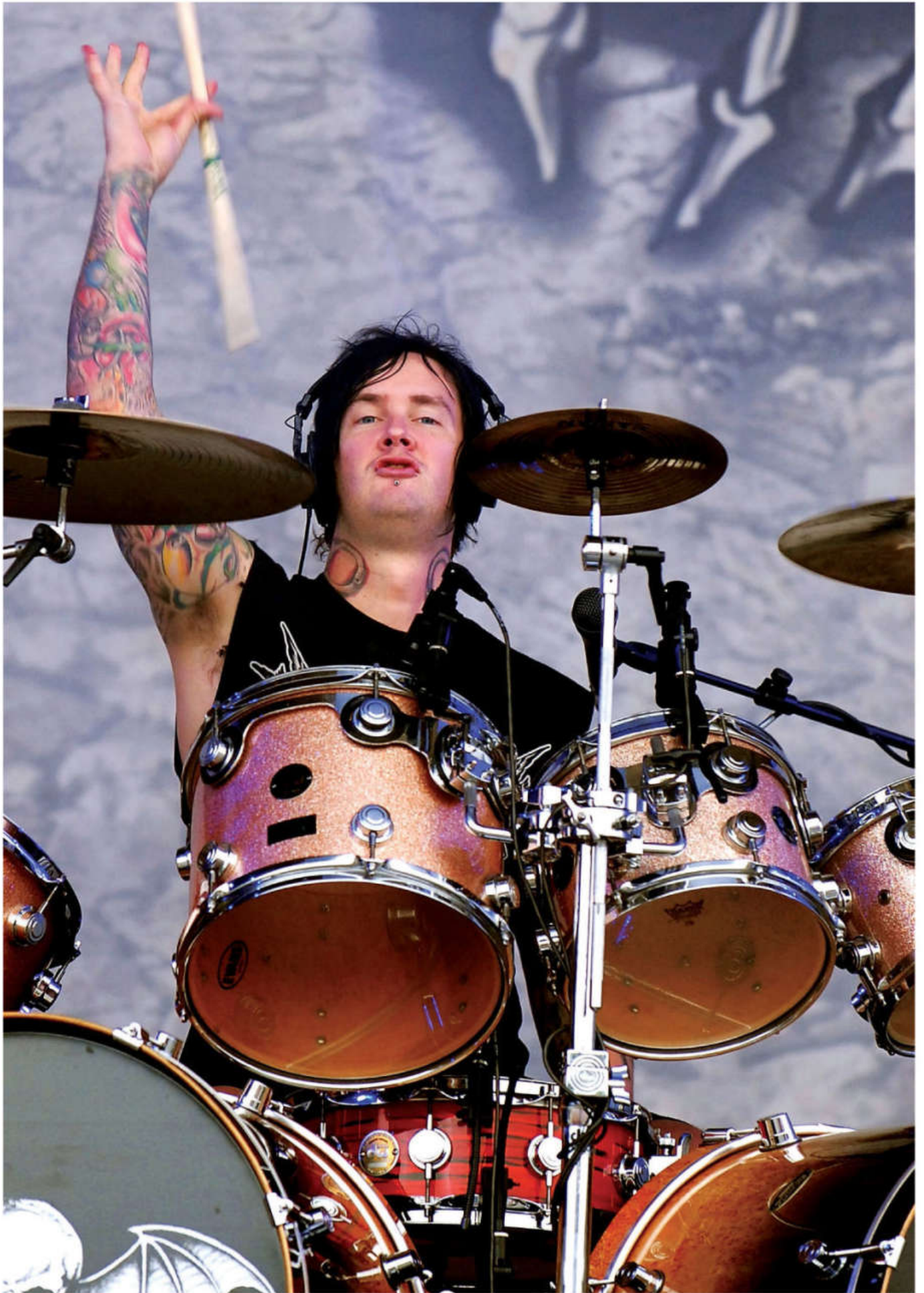


### RELATED ARTISTS:

Avenged Sevenfold  
CLASSIC CUTS:

Avenged Sevenfold *City Of Evil* (2005), Avenged Sevenfold *Avenged Sevenfold* (2007)





# Buddy Rich

A quarter-century since his passing, jazz and big band legend Buddy Rich is still considered one of the greatest ever drummers

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

Just about every serious poll of the world's greatest-ever drummers puts Buddy Rich at number one. April 2nd, 2012 marked a quarter-century since Buddy died and today's top drummers are still trying to figure out his genius.

The moment he first played the UK with his Swingin' New Big Band in 1966 caused frenzied excitement amongst musicians and press alike. His reputation preceded him, and any tub-thumper previously only vaguely aware of his name was left in no doubt they had witnessed the arrival of a master. From then on till his death in 1987 Buddy enjoyed a unique relationship with his British fans, appearing in TV specials, on the *Parkinson* show and unforgettably sparring with Ronnie Verrell's Animal on *The Muppet Show*. Alongside his undeniable virtuosity his self-mocking humour and sense of mischief appealed to the British psyche.

His universal influence is also attributable to the fact that Buddy was revered not just by big band and jazz drummers, but equally by rock drummers. He was as much a hero to and influence on emerging British stars like Ian Paice and John Bonham as he was on swing drummers like Kenny Clare, Ronnie Verrell and Eric

small and big band settings, with his own bands and with the likes of the Dorsey brothers, Benny Carter, Harry James and Jazz At The Philharmonic. He cameo'ed in many movies such as *Symphony Of Swing* (1939), *Las Vegas Nights* (1940), *Ship Ahoy* (1942) and *How's About It* (1943), and when TV arrived in the '50s was a natural for that medium too. By now he was widely recognised as the world's leading big band drummer, but he also often sang, tap-danced, acted and was always good value on chat shows like Merv Griffin's and Johnny Carson's.

Besides his barnstorming big band performances he could be a most tasteful and inspiring accompanist, particularly when given the opportunity to work with other jazz giants from Lester Young and Charlie Parker, through Nat King Cole and Ella Fitzgerald, to Count Basie and Art Tatum. From duelling with Oscar Peterson (*The Monster*, 1955) to his septet recordings with vibraphonist Mike Mainieri (*The Driver*, 1960), Buddy's inventiveness never ceases to astound.

Buddy finally left trumpeter Harry James' band in 1966, once again to lead his own big band. He ran this for the next 21 years, making his most important

bands," explains Dave Weckl. "He combined that with what drummers like Chick Webb, 'Papa' Jo Jones, and Gene Krupa started, to take the drums into the soloing spotlight. But Buddy figured out from a very early age how to manipulate the drumsticks through multiple motions and rebound, and of course just sheer genius!"

What made Buddy stand out was that he was able to take this further than anyone else. "It's like he is dancing all the time," observes Porcupine Tree's Gavin Harrison. "There is a constant bubble going on, it's never static and he rarely just goes ting-a-ting on the ride, there's always something going on with the left hand interacting with his bass drum, like a non-stop train going along. A sort of low-level solo! Sometimes he's playing shuffles and triplets at quite alarming tempos. And when he plays syncopated phrases that most drummers would play hand-to-hand, he quite often plays all the accents with his right while all the ghost notes are coming off his left hand. So you might have eight notes in a row on the left hand while the right hand is stabbing at the snare, toms or cymbals. But otherwise you have like a constant motion coming off the left hand and still very few people can do that."

## MEMORY MAN

Another side of the mystique that surrounds Buddy is that he never learned to read fully and that he could memorise fiendishly complex arrangements after a couple of hearings. Buddy Rich Band saxophonist Jay Craig confirms, "I did experience this many times and, yes, that is how it worked. Usually there was someone in the band who could play a bit of drums and they would play while Buddy listened to the chart a couple of times. 'Okay, I'll fill the gaps,' he'd say and he would play it once with us and then on the gig that night. Usually within a couple of performances he would have the whole thing memorised. I think he had a system. It struck me that he always learned the last four bars first, so that, no matter what had gone on before, he always nailed the ending, which I thought was pretty smart. Once it was in his head, I think it really probably was there forever. I loved the live album he did with Sammy Davis Jr in 1966 [*The Sound Of '66*] and when we worked with Sammy at the Hollywood Bowl 20 years later Buddy came out and played a couple of things from that album. He nailed everything as if he had just played it yesterday! I was very impressed."

So did Buddy make mistakes? And did he own up?

"I can only recollect two occasions when he made mistakes," says Jay. "One he didn't own up to and later tried to blame on the band until [trumpeter] Eric Miyashiro finally snapped and told him what everyone actually knew had happened. The other occasion was when he played a fill that got a bit out of control going into the shout chorus of 'In A Mellowtone' and there was a terrible train-wreck. Buddy stopped the band and we all thought, "Uh-oh, this is going to be bad!" But, to our astonishment, he just started laughing and said, "Oh

## BUDDY WAS LIKE NO OTHER JAZZ DRUMMER - HE PLAYED WITH FEROCIOUS INTENSITY, AND ROCK DRUMMERS IDENTIFIED WITH HIM

Delaney. He stretched the boundaries of what was possible and inspired every rock drummer who took a nightly solo throughout the '60s and '70s.

## YOUTHFUL GENIUS

Bernard 'Buddy' Rich was born on 30 September, 1917, and it was at the Bijou Theatre in Fort Wayne, Indiana, that the 18-month-old 'Pal' (as he was nicknamed by his parents Robert Rich and Bess Skolnik Rich), was given a pair of sticks and began playing along to his parent's vaudeville act in perfect time. Performing as Traps The Drum Wonder, by the age of six he became the world's second-highest paid child entertainer at 11. Reaching maturity he jumped ship from showbiz to his beloved jazz, wowing everyone who saw him with Joe Marsala's band at the Manhattan Hickory House in 1937. His incendiary talent was recognised by his peers and band leaders fought to get him on their stand. He was brash and cocky and didn't endear himself to all, but his virtuosity and crowd-pleasing brilliance was never in question. Moving swiftly through the bands of Bunny Berigan and Artie Shaw, by 1938 he met Frank Sinatra in trombonist Tommy Dorsey's band. Sinatra became a life-long friend and straight after WWII he put up \$50,000 to enable Buddy to form his own big band, furthering the drummer-leader tradition of Chick Webb and Gene Krupa. Disbanding in 1949, Rich appeared in

statement for which he has gone down in musical history. In the middle of the rock revolution, when swing bands were old hat and impossibly uneconomical, Buddy successfully bucked the trend. This was such a bold move it attracted admiration and created a massive buzz in the music world. This was a time of unprecedented musical experimentation in rock music. But Buddy was like no other jazz drummer - he was famous, outspoken and he played with such ferocious intensity that rock drummers identified with him totally. Kicking off in breathtaking style with *Swingin' New Big Band* (1966), there quickly followed a series of indispensable albums: *Big Swing Face* (1967), *Take It Away* (1968) and *Mercy, Mercy* (1968). *Swingin' New Big Band* featured a glittering medley from the musical *West Side Story* which became Buddy's signature. Right up to his death he would play this punishing piece every night, culminating in a mega solo encompassing his trademarks of speed, endurance, hand-foot coordination, touch, cymbal artistry and mastery of the single-stroke roll. Everything he achieved was on a standard four-piece White Marine Pearl kit, usually a Slingerland, Ludwig or Rogers.

Buddy's soloing ability is legendary, but the way in which he drove his big band is equally impressive. "His style was based and built on the era of music in that period, from Vaudeville to the big bands, dance





well... win some, lose some. Back to the drum break!" Once in a while we'd be finishing the night with 'Channel One Suite' and, after his solo, Buddy would play the cue for the end of 'West Side Story'! As most of the guys had everything memorised it was not a problem and we would all follow him. He usually didn't realise what had happened until someone told him later on the bus and we'd all have a good laugh about it."

### MONSTER OR SOFTIE?

There is abundant evidence that Buddy did not readily suffer fools and slackers. Hardly surprising, the man was a genius. But his reputation has undoubtedly suffered over the years on account of the infamous 'Bus Tapes'. Recorded surreptitiously on the band bus by pianist Lee Musiker around 1983, Buddy can be heard in a foul temper telling the band in no uncertain terms what he thinks of their lacklustre performances.

"He was volatile, I'll give you that," laughs Buddy's daughter Cathy Rich. "He definitely had a temper, he was a perfectionist, which at that level you have to be. There's always this thing about the bus tapes, but I'll tell you what that is: a man really passionate about what he does and not wanting to settle for anything less."

Numerous anecdotes relate Buddy's outspoken nature right from an early age. But his later bands were populated by talented young music graduates to whom he could have been a grandfather. It was inevitable that at times he would have to give them a dressing-down. Cathy saw it first-hand. "It was like being a troop leader for the cub scouts, all these kids running around! Trying to wrangle a bunch of 20-year-olds when you're 60 cannot be easy. There's a lot of different personalities you have to put up with. And he was a perfectionist. It's only what happens in the dug-out of a baseball field when the coach is mad because you screwed it up."

Gregg Bissonette says, "His band was the most amazing, well-run machine. He ran that with an iron fist, but his band respected him, his horn players were constantly looking at his left hand to make sure they were not behind or ahead of the beat. In Buddy's band you did not play where you felt like it, you played where Buddy put it. And that was his philosophy - yeah, we'll have fun and go on the road, but he ran a tight ship."

John Blackwell recognises that need for discipline at the highest level: "We can also learn from Buddy how to be a bandleader. Buddy led his band with such a command that you only see from other leaders like James Brown, Prince, Michael Jackson and Miles Davis. When I see Buddy, or any of these acts, the music is played with such perfection it's as if I'm listening to the record itself and all I can say after the show is, 'Wow!' And I know this for sure being in Prince's band, NPG."

"Buddy was always totally in control on his own gigs and on the bus," Jay Craig confirms. "He had the words 'Inside this bus you are outside the limits of the civilised universe' painted above the door of the bus. He would often demand 'silent running' and hated the sound of bottles clinking or ring-pulls on beer cans being pulled. If you wanted to open a beer can on a 'silent' night-ride (usually following a tense gig) you and a couple of other guys had to all cough at the same time to cover up the sound! He was also in charge of the heating, which was not great for most of us as he sat by the door on 'The Bridge' [the coldest spot on the bus]. Guys in 'The Ghetto' at the back would sometimes have their shirts off and be having difficulty breathing! Buddy was certainly the toughest bandleader I ever worked for, but he used to tell us, 'You guys think I'm tough? Well,



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## HIS TRADEMARKS WERE SPEED, ENDURANCE, COORDINATION, CYMBAL ARTISTRY AND MASTERY OF THE SINGLE-STROKE ROLL

you should try working for Tommy Dorsey!"

Buddy was tough in every sense. He demanded the highest standards, but he toured constantly throughout his life and he himself never ever gave less than his all. Cathy Rich says, "I saw him probably more than anybody in the best places and the worst - 10,000 people or 10 people, his level was always the same, he felt that he owed it to the audience no matter what."

### THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Buddy was his own harshest taskmaster. The sort of health issues that would have seen most retire early were treated as irritations by Buddy who suffered his first heart attack as early as 1959 and in 1983 honoured a residency at Ronnie Scott's Club just 55 days following multiple by-pass surgery.

Trumpeter Simon Gardner remembers: "We were in Yugoslavia, I think, during 1984. When we got to the venue Buddy was already there but was in terrible pain. His heart was playing him up and he was sitting on the side of the stage clutching his chest. Well, we thought that was that. No gig, end of tour. But no, Buddy wouldn't give in. We did the gig, and he played as incredibly as ever. I used to stand right behind him and I was ready to catch him all through the concert. But he was so tough and determined, a little heart pain wasn't going to stop him. Buddy Rich was something else. He's got to be the most exciting, dynamic drummer ever to have lived. I'll never forget my experience playing in that band. I grew up overnight and learned my greatest ever lesson in playing and working in big bands."

Despite his reputation, for everyone who has a story of his temper there are more who will testify to Buddy's consideration. Jay Craig remembers: "He was a very sensitive individual which is a side of him that people

never hear about. I saw him in tears on several occasions and it nearly always involved tramps. It upset him to see people like that and he'd sometimes stop the bus and give a tramp some money or get him a hot dog. I've often wondered if this was anything to do with one of his idols, [Woody Herman drummer] Dave Tough. I recall him telling the story of how he was once walking up Broadway and he saw a guy lying drunk in the street. To Buddy's horror he realised it was Dave. Needless to say, Buddy helped him as much as he could."

Buddy Rich was a complex character, then - one minute tough and demanding, the next charming and considerate. He had that rare charisma that would light up a room, filling it with expectation. Through it all he never lost his wicked sense of humour - that twinkle was never far from his eye. Anyone who saw him in concert will never forget him staggering down from behind his kit after the first of his marathon solos, and, sweating profusely with a towel around his neck, proceed to regale the audience with a five minute improvisation worthy of a top New York stand-up. There is no doubt that above all that he was a drumming genius, perhaps the greatest ever. **R**

### ESSENTIALS



#### RELATED ARTISTS:

Buddy Rich Big Band,  
Tommy Dorsey

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Buddy  
Rich 'Swingin' New Big Band

(1966), Buddy Rich *Big Swing Face* (1967),  
Buddy Rich *Mercy, Mercy* (1968)



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# Tomas Haake

Haake is the extreme metal drumming monster with Swedish metallers Meshuggah, known for his polyrhythmic beats and insanely heavy grooves

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

For two decades since their debut, *Contradictions Collapse*, Tomas Haake and Meshuggah have been pushing at the limits of metal, making their densely-crafted music from layers of polyrhythms and unconventional time signatures. Haake's talent for navigating his way through the complex arrangements has made him one of the most respected players in extreme metal.

## Have you changed much as a player between last album *ObZen* and current release *Koloss*?

"There is a huge difference from the last album. *ObZen* had so many songs with a lot of structured double bass patterns, those odd groupings that go over a straight 4/4 beat, so I had to put a lot of time into learning the stuff for that album. This album is definitely more straightforward and for me on drums, I had to really spend time getting comfortable with different tempos. This album has more songs that were not in my comfort zone as far as tempos go. It was a lot of practice to get into the groove of each song so the effort and time was spent more on that."

## What was outside your comfort zone?

"I think most drummers, most musicians, have certain tempos where they feel comfortable. Pretty much anything from 100 to 150bpm is where most of our songs have been and that's my comfort zone. We have a couple of songs on this one that have awkward tempos, really slow tempos like 85bpm and double that, 170bpm. 'Do Not Look Down' is one of those tempos, I think it is 160bpm, where you want to play the quarter-notes but at the same time you want to play eighth notes. It's one of those in-between tempos so depending on the part of the song I go from eighth notes to quarter notes. 'Behind The Sun' is really slow. The second song on the album, 'The Demon's Name Is Surveillance', the tempo is not that difficult but it has a waltz feel to it and to play the 16th-note triplets constantly over a long period of time within that waltz feel is something I've never done before."

## What inspired you to go for the waltz?

"It wasn't me. In this band whoever writes the song dictates how the drums and the feel will be. We usually don't even change the tempos and that's why sometimes you end up in a situation where something sounds fairly easy when you listen to it but once you're behind the kit a certain tempo can feel way more awkward than you initially thought it would. As far as the waltz, it was Fredrik [Thordendal, guitarist] who wrote the song, so he dictated that. We always program drums when we make the demos so it was pretty much trying to emulate what he had programmed."

## What did you take into the studio?

"I used two different snares. I used my favourite snare which is an old Sonor 14"x8" super heavy Bell Bronze

with a thick shell for more than half of the album. I used a Sonor 14"x7" Maple snare for the other tracks. Fredrick, our lead guitar player, also plays drums and he has a beautiful old '70s Ludwig kit with really big toms, 16", 18", 20" so I borrowed those for 'I Am Colossus'. I did go through quite a lot of cymbals on this album so I had to change them out for that reason."

## You were breaking cymbals in the studio?

"Yeah. Some of the tracks are more straightforward and it lets you really bash the cymbals, I tend to lean into them more I guess and they break. I usually go through quite a lot. If we're on tour, at least a cymbal or two a week but for the album it's also a matter of the cymbals we chose to use, they were not your typical metal cymbals. They just sound so beautiful I had to record with the Sabian Artisan Vault cymbals and they're not really designed for metal playing. They're jazzier cymbals so they really open up quickly."

## How do you get through a full live set?

"Even though we just talked about going through cymbals when I'm on the road, over the last five years I definitely toned down my playing as far as how hard I play live. I try to not overly exert myself in the first few songs because there is payback at the end of the set if you do that. I try to be relaxed and not lay into it too hard. As long as I have that mindset it's usually fine."

## One thing all the young metal drummers want is faster feet and to bring up their weaker foot. Is that something you've worked on?

"It's the same for me, my left foot is way weaker than my right and I get cramps on the front side of the legs. I guess it depends on how you play, if you play more heel down or heel up. I don't really use my calves when I play. My calves look like an old woman's. They look ridiculous. It's all basically the front of my calves. My left is definitely weaker. 'Bleed' from *ObZen* for example has a lot of bass drum work but it doesn't take that much effort because it's more like tap dancing. Even though it sounds like it's continuous, you get to rest because you do double-strokes on the right and the left is going straight and not really at a fast pace. I wouldn't even say that I'm a fast bass drum player like a lot of the guys you see in extreme metal nowadays. I know some people might think I'm really fluent when it comes to double bass but when it comes to hammering 16th notes, I'm not one of the faster drummers."

## You say that, but there is some very intense playing on *Koloss*.

"That's an old school song in the way that it's played. Even though it's fast it's mostly single kick and snare and then you have a pattern in the riff that I follow with my right hand between a crash and a stack or between a stack and hi-hat. It's not really too hard to play that style because it's straightforward."

## Is it tricky to keep the separation between the instruments?

"Yeah, definitely. It's a challenge for this music and since we do a lot of the guitar parts with eight-string guitars downtuned and playing in unison in the same octave as the bass, you really fill up that whole area sonically. It's really tricky to get the drums through without sacrificing the guitar sound. I definitely feel that for a couple of tracks, especially 'Marrow' on the new album, the drums really don't come through the way they are meant to. You get to choose between having that fat sound on all the tracks and having to sacrifice a little of what's going on with the drums or making the whole guitar and bass package way thinner to allow for everything on the drums to come out. That's basically the only song that really suffered with that because it has very intricate ghost notes. When you hear only the drums the ghost notes are fairly loud but once you add the whole bass, guitar and vocals package to that they got lost in the mix. Then again you've got to consider the overall sound. It's hard to have a completely different sound on one track just to allow the drum playing to come out, that doesn't really make sense. It's a shame but you've got to choose."

## It is unusual for drummers to write lyrics...

"It's definitely something I enjoy doing. It feels like it is something I would do regardless of whether or not I had a band to write for. Every other year I have a period, usually during winter when it is really dark and gloomy where I am really inspired and I tend to write a lot. Neil Peart was the first time I ever noticed that a drummer wrote the lyrics for a band so that was an eye-opener for me. I'd always assumed it was Geddy Lee who wrote the lyrics. It's also a matter of how you can express yourself in a lyric and how good you are at that language. Me and Marten [Hagstrom, guitarist] have done pretty much all the lyrics and I think our familiarity with the English language is greater than Jens, the vocalist. I'm usually the one who actually adds the vocals to the music and since our music is very percussive, there is definitely a lot of effort to fit a certain lyric to a certain song. I always try to make it as straightforward to the 4/4 beat as possible but there is so much going on in the music you have to consider, so even the vocals end up being a percussive instrument as well." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Meshuggah

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Meshuggah *Contradictions Collapse* (1991), Meshuggah *ObZen* (2008), Meshuggah *Koloss* (2012)





# Dave Weckl

From his breakthrough with Simon and Garfunkel to playing fusion with Chick Corea, Dave Weckl has been a technical wizard with feel and groove to spare

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**F**ew drummers have commanded the respect of their peers like Dave Weckl. His dazzling virtuoso technique combined with a deep pocket and refined musical sensibility have made him one of the most celebrated drummers in the business. His first moment in the spotlight came when he played with Simon and Garfunkel on their reunion tour in 1983, taking the coveted drum throne previously inhabited by Steve Gadd. Two years later, Dave was asked to join jazz maestro Chick Corea's new group, the Elektric Band, firmly staking his claim to be one of the most exciting and gifted players on the jazz-fusion scene. In the two decades since first playing with Corea, Dave has maintained a tireless pursuit of excellence, looking for new ways to express his art through the music of drumming. His discography seems to grow at an exponential rate as he lends his hand to a huge range of projects and styles, but along the way he has found the time for his own group, the Dave Weckl Band.

## Do you remember the music that first got you excited about the drums?

"In the early days I was just playing to rock'n'roll records. My dad was into Dixieland jazz and big bands, so he turned me on to Pete Fountain. [His] drummer was Jack Sperling. Jack was really my first introduction to being able to play straight-ahead swing, so that was challenging. He played complex enough to make it interesting and simple enough to make it accessible. Then my dad brought home a Buddy Rich record when I was 11 or 12, and from that moment I was totally into trying to figure that out."

## What was your first big break?

"I was in touch with Peter Erskine from the time I was in college, and Peter recommended me for a gig with a group called French Toast, which later became Michel Camilo's group. Anthony Jackson was playing bass so that was a huge step into the professional ranks of the musicians in New York. Anthony recommended me for the Simon and Garfunkel tour, and out of that all kinds of studio work started to happen. Steve Khan was producing Bill Connors, and he got me and Tom Kennedy together and we co-wrote Bill's entire record. We were doing a gig in Manhattan in 1984 and Chick Corea happened to be in town. He kept hearing my name and he was looking for a drummer for the Elektric Band. Tania Maria had Chick come over to hear Michel Camilo. Chick was like, 'Yeah, great, but who's the drummer?'"

## When you played with Simon and Garfunkel, did you have to recreate Steve Gadd's parts or was there room for your own interpretations?

"Paul was completely into anything new. We rehearsed for three weeks and we had our own slant on a lot of the music. We were doing 'Me And Julio...' like a salsa-funk thing. I was honoured to sit in that chair and

play '50 Ways...' and 'Late In The Evening' and all those tunes. I didn't go as far as using four sticks but I pretty much played the parts. Like Gadd, I try to orchestrate my parts to become part of the composition, so if you play anything else it doesn't work. There aren't too many other ways to play '50 Ways To Leave Your Lover' other than with what Gadd created, because it became part of the song. As for the other stuff, Paul was definitely not into doing it the way it had been done. We came up with our own grooves and our own way of doing things."

## There are some surprising people on your discography, like Diana Ross...

"Back in those days, when I was getting calls for Robert Plant and Diana Ross and Pebo Bryson, that was basically one or two producers who were calling me because they liked the way I played. At the time I was doing a lot of r'n'b pop gigs and was gaining a reputation as the new studio guy in town. This was all in the period right after the Simon and Garfunkel tour and before I left for Chick. After that I really didn't get called too much because all of a sudden I was 'Chick Corea's drummer'. You get pigeon-holed pretty quickly."

## As a session musician, do you ever finish an assignment and then worry that the phone won't ring again for the next one?

"I think it goes with the nature of the business, always living on the cusp and the edge, it's a horrible existence. But, having said that, I worked very hard to try to build so many things within the industry that could possibly make me money while I sleep, so I'm not relying on the phone to ring all of the time. That's why I've expanded into as many different arenas of the business as I possibly can, with instructional products, instrumental products, doing a lot on the production side of things with engineering and mixing. That's what I try to tell young people: you're not just entering the drumming business, you're entering the music business and you're going to have to be smart about it because just surviving as a drummer has really never been enough."

## What inspires you now?

"I enjoy all of the current players: the new young kids that are coming up playing great, all of that's inspiring; seeing my 10-year-old daughter sing a song is inspiring for me. But just going back to the past, to where it all came from and what influenced me in the first place. I still get that same charge looking at Buddy's stuff, Tony Williams, Billy Cobham, Police concerts with Stewart..."

## Do you have any unfulfilled drumming goals?

"There's a few. I've always wanted to play with guys like Sting. Paul Simon was really the only artist that I got to play with [where] I enjoyed his music and the way he sang. I never really got to get into it that heavily with any other singing artist of that calibre. Robert Plant was

cool but that wasn't a touring thing; we did a couple of tunes on the Honeydrippers record and that was it. I've gotten to do a few things with Natalie Cole and some great singers, but nothing where I've gotten to really work with them, play their music and tour."

## Can you pick one recent recording for people wanting to check out your playing?

"There's an obscure record that I did for Yiorgos Fakanas, a Greek musician, called *Domino* and I was the first one to layer on that record, but it was hard music and there was a lot of time involved in the playing aspect. That's a pretty good demonstration of musicality applied to someone else's music."

## What is the one thing you try to impart to your audience when you teach a clinic?

"It's not so much imparting a technical way but an approach, a concept to be free to create, because if you're [blocking] your own way at the instrument you're already stopping any kind of creative energy coming out and your feel and ability are compromised. That's really the most important thing I try to communicate and demonstrate through different exercises of independence, all foundational exercises to be able to apply musically when you get there so you're not worried about how to do something."

## What did you take from your studies with renowned teacher Freddie Gruber?

"Freddie introduced me to this whole principle of how the laws of physics apply to playing music. It got me into a whole other approach and a reality of understanding some technical differences of how balance and things work differently simply by switching the grip from the front of the hand to the middle of the hand, allowing things to happen more naturally. Understanding how body motion really affects the swing, the feel of how things happen, because you're paying more attention to the space that way instead of the notes. The space creates the notes and how they fall - it's not the notes themselves, it's the space in between that dictates where that pulse is - so if you're stiff with the space then the time is going to be stiff. If you're flowing it's going to be a flowing time feel." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Chick Corea Elektric Band, Simon And Garfunkel, Dave Weckl Band

### CLASSIC CUTS: Chick

Corea Elektric Band *The Chick Corea Elektric Band* (1986), *Chick Corea Elektric Band Light Years* (1987)





# Lars Ulrich

The massively influential livewire behind the kit for thrash metal superstars Metallica spoke to *Rhythm* about pushing himself, staying in shape and not caring if people think he's crap...

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

**M**etallica have had their ups and downs over the last decade, it's fair to say. The gazillion-selling ex-thrash metal band from San Francisco had risen to the very top of the showbiz pile before incurring the wrath of critics with 2003's *St. Anger*. The drums included a snare sound that made most of us cringe while the whining snottiness of it all made us gag. And more recently, 'Tallica confounded, nay confused, us all with their 2011 Lou Reed collaboration *Lulu*.

But there's no question that when they fire on all cylinders, Metallica, driven by their drummer and, some would say, band leader Lars Ulrich, are still a massive and relevant force in metal. To the delight of the band's vast fanbase, Metallica's 2008 album *Death Magnetic* - fast, heavy and stuffed with fresh ideas - was their best since 1991's planet-shafting 'Black' album. No wonder Lars was on fine form when *Rhythm* sat down with him for a chat in 2008. Perfectly happy to discuss the many criticisms he has fielded over the years of being a 'technically challenged' (read: 'crap') drummer, and not afraid to paint an accurate picture of *Death Magnetic*'s recording with super-producer Rick Rubin, Lars was happier than we'd seen him in years. We could hardly get a word in - but then, what's new?

**Lars, our readers will be relieved to hear that on *Death Magnetic* you have a drum sound that is a world away from *St. Anger*...**

"Well, thank you! Rick Rubin is a big fan of keeping things organic. We found out along the way that he's not much for samples or triggers or anything artificial. He's a pretty straight-ahead kind of guy - he doesn't like reverb, he doesn't like anything on the drums. He likes stuff to be in your face and to sound as natural as possible. This is what drums sound like when they're not f\*\*ked with - when they're not reverbed out, and when there's not big fat samples on them."

**Did Rubin push you to play the drums better?**

"He pushed me to listen to the other guys. We have this tendency towards, 'You start with the drums, and then you add this, and this...' like you're building a house, with the drums the foundation and everything else an afterthought. But he didn't want that - he wanted us all to play together and interact with each other. His whole thing was, 'We're not going into the studio until the songs are written!'; 'We're not recording until you can play these songs with your f\*\*kin' hands tied behind your backs, upside-down, while you're sleeping!' So the studio is not a place of creativity, it's a place of execution. He made me play better because he made us rehearse more. We don't necessarily over-rehearse, [but] because we rehearsed a lot, we played better."

**How long did it take to record the drum tracks?**

"We recorded the songs fairly quickly - a song a day on the drums. There were days when he literally stopped

the session and said, 'You're not playing to each other, you're not listening to each other, you're not in synch. Go home, go take a cold shower, go to the movies, go have a f\*\*kin' alcoholic beverage and come back tomorrow!' And, of course, you'd come back the next day and do the exact same thing you did the day before, and all of a sudden you're playing together - and you sit there and you're like, 'Is it me or is it Rick?' It's just a part of that Rick Rubin madness that you have to surrender to."

**Did you try to push yourself to the limit of your abilities on the new album?**

"I tried to push myself as hard as physically possible. I would work myself into a zone. I'd show up at the studio and have a couple of yoghurts and some fruit, and nine cups of tea, and flex a little in front of the mirror! Then just f\*\*king go. I could usually do that for three hours, maybe four. On most of the songs, we got three takes per snare head before we had to change it. You've gotta remember, these are eight, nine, 10-minute songs. So we'd get three takes and then have to spend 30 minutes changing the snare head! While Flemming [Larsen, Ulrich's tech] was doing that, I'd be pacing around like a caged animal, trying to stay in that zone."

**You have a clean snare sound this time...**

"I have those Tama bell brass snare drums, the LU signature, that I've been playing for a while. The dynamics are very loud and they've got rims that hold up to a beating. I'm a lifer with Tama - they gave me a drum kit in 1984 and they give me a couple every year now. I'm loyal to them, I haven't changed my kit since I sat down in 1993 and said, 'I don't need all these toms.' The second floor tom is an 18" and we call it 'the coffee table' - because I don't think I ever hit it. It's there to put my tea on! Since then it's been pretty much the same. The colour now is some sort of orange sparkle ('Marigold Sparkle'). They called up and said, 'What colour would you like the drums?' and I saw one of Kirk's fuzz pedals laying on a table in the studio, which was a pretty orange. So I said I wanted that colour - just put some sparkle in there and I'm a happy guy."

**A lot of players change their configuration all the time. Are there really no improvements you could make to your kit?**

"Nothing changes around here, I'm a man of habit. I like to get up on stage and know that it's all the same s\*\*t. The other thing that drives the Tama people crazy is that most of the s\*\*t I use, they don't make any more! I play these kick pedals from 1953 or something. They're so outdated that I don't know where we find the parts for them."

**Have you got a big drum collection?**

"I'm not a fanatical drum guy. I don't collect drums, I don't have 72 Slingerland snare drums in a closet, I

don't make trips to Nashville to buy antique drums - that stuff doesn't interest me all that much. Drums are almost functional to me. When James Hetfield plays a guitar riff and my d\*\*k gets hard, then the drums have a function. Obviously I love playing drums live and in the studio, I love writing and producing and all that stuff, but I don't sit around and solo all day."

**You've said that the length of Metallica's future career will be determined by how you can physically cope with the demands of playing the show. Do you stay in good shape?**

"I do the best I can. I run, pretty religiously, every day. It's not only good physically, it's good mentally. No cellphones, no managers breathing down your back. Do I run without a security guy? F\*\*k yeah! Seriously, if I don't get a chance to run because I'm at the gig, I go and run sometimes in the concert traffic. I can slither in and out of any situation, I've got my hat on, no f\*\*ker recognises me, it's all good. I'm almost invisible. I also eat a pretty balanced diet. I don't eat junk food. I eat a lot of sushi and a lot of lean steaks and egg whites and yoghurt and fruit. I don't drink beer, I mostly drink red wine. I keep my weight pretty consistent. Obviously you stay in shape by playing a lot, and the hardest thing is when you take a long period of time off, because I don't play much when we're not working."

**You've had a lot of flak over the years from people who accuse you of being a poor drummer. Does that ever trouble you?**

"It used to, back in the day - and I spent a lot of time overcompensating for that on the early records. But then you wake up one day and you're like, 'Whatever.' It hasn't bothered me for about 15 years. I'm no Joey Jordison, I'm no Mike Portnoy, and I have nothing but love and respect and admiration for all those guys. When I hear some of the young dudes, they blow my mind with what they can do with their feet and stuff - but it's not something that makes me go, 'I need to feel better about myself so I'm gonna learn how to do what they do with my feet.' I'm not a particularly accomplished drummer but I am very, very, very good at understanding the role of the drums next to James Hetfield's rhythm guitar. I guarantee you I'm the best guy in the world for that, and that's enough for me!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Metallica

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Metallica *Kill 'Em All* (1983),  
Metallica *And Justice For All*  
(1988), Metallica *Metallica* (1990)





MA.

# Dom Howard

Dom Howard provides the musical beats that propel indie rock power trio Muse's expansive and ambitious sound

WORDS: JORDAN MCLACHLAN

**W**hen *Rhythm* meet up with the very, very busy man behind Muse's powerful grooves, Dom Howard is on excellent form – despite nursing something of a hangover from a rare night off the evening before.

Even a numbness of head doesn't derail Dom's thoughtful, considered conversation, in which he's very happy to talk about taking the production reins for their most recent album *The Resistance* and how, even now, he usually tenses up on stage. In the same way that the band deliver their wide-ranging, ambitious music with panache, Dom talks with incisive clarity. It's this kind of no-messing, deliberate approach that has propelled Muse to the peak of their game. Which is why it's almost a surprise that the band haven't taken the plunge and produced a record themselves before...

## Did producing *The Resistance* feel like a big step forward as a band?

"Every album has felt like we've taken a leap from the one before, to be honest. We can't release anything unless we know we've pushed ourselves and done things better than we have in the past. This one did feel different, though. It was a huge challenge to produce by ourselves and the three of us have a real sense of achievement having managed to do that."

## How did the decision to take on the producer's mantle come about?

"In the course of making the last record [2006's *Black Holes And Revelations*] we really learned a lot about the technicalities of producing. We gained a lot of experience and that stood us in good stead to work on this one on our own. We've had a studio – which is in a beautiful spot where Matt lives in Italy – for a while, so it was a case of having both a place to make the record and, for the first time, the confidence to do it. So it was just a case of thinking, why the hell not?"

## Did you enjoy the process of working on your own, or were there down-sides?

"We loved it. The thing is, for starters the studio is just a lovely place to be. So it's hard not to have a good time. On top of that we felt a real freedom to explore and express ideas. We didn't rush the creative process, so it took a while to write. And as things came together there was a definite collective glimmer in our eyes. We really enjoyed making this record, probably more so than any other. The only thing we were conscious of was not taking too long when it came to actually recording the songs. We were all aware that without some form of outside help, and some discipline, we could mess about with sounds and ideas forever."

## Was there a masterplan for the album's sound before you started working on tracks?

"We started off thinking that we'd do something that was simple and raw. But we ended up not liking it, so as

time went on we delved further and further into making a more produced, complex record.

"We took quite an experimental approach with a lot of it, but it was still very much a case of treating every song individually. Everything has its own personality and so we kind of let each song find its own path in terms of the arrangement and production level that we took it to."

## The album tips the nod to a wide variety of genres; bombastic rock, epic ballads, classical symphony and even r'n'b. It's only really Queen who have managed to sell billions of albums with that kind of scope in the past...

"Well I, for one, have always been a big fan of Queen. They are a perfect example of a band being able to cover an amazing amount of musical ground in one album. They had that classical influence, which added a sense of epic-ness to certain tracks, but it also had an impact on their group sense of ambition, I think.

"Queen were thinking on a huge scale, and that involved not limiting themselves to being a straightforward rock band. Take an album like *A Night At The Opera* – you've got the songs 'You're My Best Friend', 'Bohemian Rhapsody' and 'Seaside Rendezvous' all next to each other. To be brave enough, and to be good enough, to get away with that is incredible and a real source of inspiration."

## It's fair to say that Muse have Queen's sense of ambition. You've never been a band to limit yourselves, have you?

"No, we've always wanted to be a big band, and I don't see that there's anything wrong with that. As a band we take in a lot of influences, and a lot of stuff goes in subconsciously. And I don't mean just musically – people that we meet, places that we go, things that we do, all shape us as a band and that in turn has an effect on the music that we make. And those influences also have a wider effect on how you think and what your goals end up being."

## What about your approach to the drums on *The Resistance*?

"I didn't really have any preconceived ideas about how I wanted the album to turn out in terms of my playing. In the back of my mind I wanted it to be natural and spontaneous, though, and just to react in whichever way felt right to what Matt and Chris were doing."

## With as expansive a record as this one, was it always clear where the drums would fit?

"With 'United States Of Eurasia', it was pretty obvious what needed to happen as far as the drums were concerned. Others drive you up the wall – sometimes you can try things for weeks and it never sits right. 'Undisclosed Desires' was a bit like that. In fact we had to put it to one side for a while."

## With the huge range of sounds that crop up on a typical Muse album, do you ever worry about how to translate songs from studio to stage?

"We don't tend to think too much about how we're going to pull something off on stage while we're writing. There's always a way to deliver it live. And things tend to change anyway, to adapt to how we want it to come across on tour, so we don't restrict ourselves. 'Undisclosed Desires' is already changing – we're playing it differently than it appears on the album, and I'm sure several of the new songs will do that."

## When it comes to arranging parts and playing live, how does the group dynamic work?

"I tend to lock in with Chris [Wolstenholme, bass], but it's not always a case of the two of us playing very similar rhythmic things. An awful lot of the time we play parts that are very different, but are complementary to each other when you hear them together. I think that might be to do with being a three-piece – if we were to do a lot of unison parts it loses the 'bigness' of sound that you need on stage.

"Chris has a massive sound. He's got three channels of different bass tones going on at any one time, so it's a huge foundation for us to play off. And obviously Matt's got an incredibly complex set-up that produces a massive variety of tones, so we can sound as big as we want to."

## You've achieved a huge amount as a band and as a drummer – how do you see your playing developing in the coming years?

"Musicianship is in constant evolution and I'm always looking to expand my own abilities, in particular when it comes to being comfortable on stage. It's something that Andy Burrows [ex-Razorlight drummer] and I have talked about in the past – about how tense you can get on stage and how different you feel when you get up there as opposed to when you're in the rehearsal studio. There's definitely some weird psychology going on there and you need to combat that by being on top of your game so you can play within your limits. I don't think that we'll ever stop learning as players, there's still a lot we want to do. It's the things we haven't done yet that keep us driven and moving forward." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Muse

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Muse *Showbiz* (1999),

Muse *Origin Of Symmetry*

(2001), Muse *Black Holes And Revelations*

(2006), Muse *The Resistance* (2009)







# Dennis Chambers

The funk and fusion drumming legend played with Parliament-Funkadelic, jammed with James Brown as a kid and has some of the finest chops you're ever likely to hear

WORDS: SIMON BRAUND

**D**ennis Chambers has always been something of a *Rhythm* idol, and it's not difficult to see why. Alongside blinding technique, consummate good taste, stunning versatility and a right foot to die for, Dennis has got attitude. Dennis, who began playing drums at the age of four, had no formal training and learnt everything he needed to know from playing in clubs, an endeavour he embarked on at the tender age of six.

He joined George Clinton's funk conglomerate Parliament-Funkadelic at the age of 18 and was for a time house drummer for the illustrious Sugar Hill label in New York. Since then he has compiled a resumé that reads like a Who's Who of contemporary jazz and fusion talent. David Sanborn, John Scofield, Mike Stern, Bob Berg, the Brecker Brothers, Bill Evans, George Duke, Stanley Clarke and John McLaughlin have all put in an appearance on Chambers' stellar CV.

***Dennis, you were invited to play at one of the Buddy Rich memorial concerts. As a big fan of Rich, did he mean a lot to you?***

"Definitely. He was one of the most visible drummers of all time and the one I can remember having the most impact on me when I was learning to play drums in the '60s. He was the most exciting, the most... the most of everything. I never saw anybody play like that before. For a kid of five or six years old, looking at him was like looking at a god."

***And you got a chance to meet him as a child. Did he give you any encouragement?***

"Yeah. My question to him was how do you develop speed and power? And Buddy said, 'If you're really serious about speed and power, practise on pillows. And for your foot, take the spring off your pedal. Try to do eighth notes, work your way up to 16th notes and you day you'll be able to play 32nd notes. He also explained the theory of taking the spring off the pedal, like: 'Now the bass drum head is your spring, so you can't bury your beater in the head.' That also teaches you exactly where the weight is in the footboard."

***Surely in the '60s the most visible drummer was Ringo? You never thought about taking that road?***

"Nope. At a very young age I hated The Beatles. All that, 'She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah...' I never had any time for that. I love the later Beatles, the White album I love. But you're talking to a person whose mother was a backing singer with Motown, and that's how I got into the business. When I got into playing drums at four, I already had an ear for good music. Good black music, soul music. When I first heard The Beatles I was told that they were just emulating black artists. Even back then, when I'd listen to The Beatles, I just didn't get a feeling from their music. I'd listen to Little Richard, Chuck Berry or Fats Domino and get a feeling from it."

***So you never had a problem with pop music?***

"No, I played pop music for chrissake! But your goal was always to become a serious musician rather than join a band and make a million dollars. My goal, if I had one, was that I just wanted to be the best I could be. And to listen to all styles of music and be the best at all of them - jazz, rock, fusion, funk, whatever. You'll always work a lot more if you can play a lot of different styles."

***Is it true you played with James Brown when you were 13?***

"No, I got an offer to play with James Brown when I was 13. I jammed with him and he offered me a gig. He was a serious hero to the black community, especially around the time of the riots in the '60s, and his music stood out more than anyone else's during that period, and he stood out as leader."

***One gig you did take was with George Clinton. What are your memories from that era?***

"I have tons of great memories from Parliament-Funkadelic and from playing with George. You'd go to sleep laughing and wake up laughing with those guys. Some of the things they'd get themselves into - and out of - were just unbelievable. There was some seriously funny stuff going on. We used to have this four-ton spaceship called the Mothership which used to come down on stage, right over my head. One night this thing came down and George came out of the spaceship completely naked. No one else could see him because of all the smoke. All of a sudden the smoke clears and there's George standing up there with his long white wig, giving the funk sign, totally naked! P-Funk was totally different to anything else I've ever done..."

***Why did you leave?***

"Well, I'd been doing it for a long while, and the group was changing."

***The impression people have is that you left because it wasn't challenging you any more...***

"Well I guess when I added all the stick percussion stuff to my set-up it became less challenging. The guy who got me into the band, the bass player Rodney Skeet Kerris, left, and I hung on for about two years until he got back in the band and we did a few more things. But George was on a lawsuit spree, suing Warner Brothers, and the group was going through a lot of things. It was just getting kinda weird. After that I went to New York and I played on a few records, and eventually I joined a band called Special Effects and played with them for a while, and then I joined John Scofield's band."

***Did your playing change during that period?***

"Didn't change at all. See, I grew up playing in jazz-fusion clubs, so it didn't change at all. In fact, if anything it's got worse, because I don't practise."

***Why is that?***

"I play all the time. It's like a mechanic or something, their job is to fix cars, so when they go home that's the last thing they want to do. I used to practise all the time. But another reason I stopped is that when I was in P-Funk, what they were into and what I was into were two totally different things. They were into strong funk grooves, and I had to live with that. What I was into was having the speed and chops from hell. They weren't into that, so I had to give it up to keep in with what they wanted. What I learnt from the experience is that when I used to practise all the time, I'd get very frustrated. There'd be things I could hear that I couldn't play. By not practising, it allowed me the freedom to just play stuff without hearing things I couldn't do."

"Also if you're practising all the time and you do a gig you end up playing all the stuff you've been practising, which won't be right for that gig. Drumming is a physical and mental thing and when the physical side of it meets the mental side, there's nothing you can't do. But if one slips and they're out of balance then it shows."

***You've played bass for a long time and you recently started playing keyboards. What effect would you say that has had on your drumming?***

"I think it's very important to play a melodic instrument, like the piano. The piano is like the centre point of all other instruments. If you want to show somebody a bassline, you can do it on the piano, you can show what notes to use, what routes to take. Same with the guitar, same with arranging a horn section. It's also great for your writing. A lot of drummers who don't play a melodic instrument aren't good writers. Playing piano has helped me understand music."

***And what about the bass?***

"The bass has the groove factor. You can show a bass player the line on the piano, but you can't show him how to groove. If you're a piano player, how can you tell Anthony Jackson what to do? If you're a bass player, you can relate, you can show him the idea and then he can take it and run with it." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Parliament-Funkadelic, John Scofield, John McLaughlin, Steely Dan

### CLASSIC CUTS:

P-Funk Allstars *Live At The Beverly Theater In Hollywood* (1983), Dennis Chambers *Getting Even* (1992), Dennis Chambers *Outbreak* (2002), John Scofield *Blue Matter* (1986), Steely Dan *Alive In America* (1995)





# Max Roach

As John Bonham is to hard rock, so Max Roach was to hard bop. *Rhythm* met one of the jazz fraternity's most eloquent spokesmen

WORDS: TREVOR PARSONS

**M**ax Roach was one of the coolest, most precise stickmen you could ever hope to hear. Along with Kenny Clarke, Max invented bop drumming. A prodigious drummer turned composer turned professor, Max sets *Rhythm* aback when he announces, "I have never heard a bad drummer."

"The fact is," he explains, "I like the sound of the instrument. I like drums. Of course, if a person is young and inexperienced, he's not supposed to keep perfect time. It takes a little bit."

Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown, Duke Ellington, Thelonius Monk, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins have all benefitted from Max's touch. *Rhythm* met the great man as he prepared for a UK tour with the Max Roach Quartet in 1989 - he sadly passed away in 2007. After half a century of innovation, *Rhythm* wanted to know, were his ideas of rhythm still changing?

"Oh yeah, every day. Nobody has a grip on it, you know? Human beings, everything, every minute, it's constantly changing. Walking is rhythm. Seriously, I think it's what makes the world go round. It's rhythm. The body has its own rhythm."

The revolution in jazz came in the move away from low-lying quarter notes on bass drum or snare to polyrhythmic flexibility held intact by the pulse on the ride cymbal, allowing the drum kit the potential to be heard as an instrument in its own right. Max has traditionally been credited with a major role in this foregrounding. He deflects the praise that's offered.

"Many other drummers brought drums to the forefront. Chick Webb and Krupa, Buddy and Baby Dodds, Papa Jo Jones. That's a nice thing for people to say, but... it's difficult you see, because the drumset is a four-limbed instrument, and its development as an instrument has been influenced by all kinds of different sources. The art of playing, it comes from all different places. It's a person who can understand and put all those things together that can make something out of it. There's so much development that's gone into playing the drumset, it's unbelievable. I hear some things that people are doing today that are fantastic."

There's no understating his commitment to drums and their place in music: "I believe in drummers getting an equal time as everybody else. So, in my groups it's not that I'm playing it solo all the time, but even if you're playing a rhythm, I think that rhythm should be upfront. It shouldn't be quietly perceived."

The best way to appreciate the Max Roach principle of equality is to look at his approach to drum solos.

"People have always done solos. The word solo means that you're playing by yourself. When a drummer is playing by himself, that's soloing. With other instruments, we assume the saxophone, for example, is playing a solo when he's playing backed up by the bass, drums and piano. But he's not really playing a solo in the pure sense of the word. He's playing in a quartet situation. But the drummer has

always been the soloist. I used to complain about that! I'd say to guys, 'Here I am killing myself playing rhythm behind you, and supporting you, and the minute I start my drum solo you all go off stage and smoke a cigarette! That's the way it is. The drummer is a pure soloist, all the time. I enjoy solos. If I'm in a musical setting I try and preserve that setting, and the personality of the piece that we are playing.'"

## NO SLEEP IN BROOKLYN

"It was during a time when the depression existed," he explains, when asked how he was originally drawn to the drums. "Parents always deposited their children in the local church to be cared for while they went out to look for work. To give the kids something to do, they had musical instruments there. First of all I tried the bugle, but I couldn't get a sound out of it and my mother said, 'Why don't you try something else?' So a couple of days later, I brought home a drum. A marching drum. I got very involved with it."

"The drumset was always in the neighbourhood. I used to watch the local drummer play with his band at what we called house rent parties. When a family was destitute, and there were no jobs, the community would give a little party. The family would buy some potatoes and fix potato salad, and make bathtub gin to sell for a few cents. 'Cos those were the rough days. They'd raise enough money that way to pay the rent. So I started fooling around with the drumset of a guy who was a drummer at these parties, even before my feet could touch the pedals."

Just as soon as feet and pedals met, he was ready to play, first in gospel bands. He learnt conventional percussion of all sorts side by side with the kit, in both marching bands and the local symphony orchestra. Formal tuition culminated in his attendance at the Manhattan School of Music, where he was introduced to tympani, mallet instruments and tuned percussion. But it was playing jazz that really blew him away.

"My first real professional gig was Duke Ellington, the big one, when I was about 17 and still at high school. In those days they called it Vaudeville; you'd be playing to shows, [Armenian composer Aram] Khachaturian's music for fire-eaters and dancers. Sonny Greer, Mr Ellington's regular drummer, was unavailable and I was recommended as a drummer who could read. When I arrived there, seeing all the instruments on stage - xylophones, tympani, tubular bells - I panicked. What was worse, there was no music. Sonny Greer used to make up parts for 'Ring Them Bells' and all these other classic compositions. Mr Ellington took one look at me, and I guess he saw right through me, because he said, 'Look, keep one eye on the act on stage, and the other on me, and everything will be fine.' So it was. I think he was one of the greatest conductors in the world."

Playing in the Paramount, which was for jazz musicians as the Metropolitan Opera House is to opera

singers, helped Max make up his mind that this was what he was going to do. He also worked long hours with combos in the clubs.

"The legitimate clubs were all over, black and white. They opened up at nine and closed at three or four. Then the illegitimate clubs opened up, about four. They were beyond the law, but there was so much graft in the city that these clubs were just as elaborate as the legitimate ones. So a musician could work from nine in the evening till about eight or nine the next morning. You had six weeks on, seven days a week, and then one week off... during which time of course you looked for another seven-day-a-week job to fill it! When Charlie Parker came to New York and saw the band we were working in, doing those kind of hours, he left his band and joined our little outfit."

Meeting and impressing Charlie Parker is some break.

"Life is funny, many times, however hard you work, it's as if things happen by chance. It's where you are, and the time, when opportunity knocks. Most people are ready. The fact that this person was standing on the right corner at the right time took him to the highest heights. When you finish studying, you have to go to a place where it's happening, like New York. So people can see you and hear you. It's what I tell my students."

On the subject of Bird, Max tells us about being put in his place by the saxophone legend - a lesson to all of us not to get big-headed: "During the war, when most of the major drummers were in the army and I was a youngster, I got all the top notch gigs. So I got a big head about it. One time I came late to a rehearsal, and Charlie Parker was sitting on the drums, waiting for me. As I came in, he started playing a Charleston with hi-hat, his left foot going chick-chick... chick-chick. Then he played a shuffle with his left hand, dup, ta-dup, ta-dup, ta-dup. He added the swingbeat with his right hand, ting, tip, ta-ting, tip, ta-ting, and then the bass drum just played 4/4, quarter notes. But the beauty of it was that you could hear everything. Nothing too loud. It was really well-balanced. He asked me, 'Hey, Max! Can you do this?' I sat down at the drumset, and for the life of me I couldn't play it! I had to take it home and practise it. He just embarrassed me and reduced me to where I should be. 'Cos he had the saxophone slung across his lap while he was doing it!'" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Max Roach *Jazz In 3/4 Time* (1957), Max Roach *Drums Unlimited* (1966), Max Roach *Members Don't Git Weary* (1968)





# Chris Adler

One of the most explosive players in modern metal, Chris Adler founded Grammy Award-nominated US heavy metal band Lamb Of God with his guitarist brother Willie

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**C**hris Adler and American metallers Lamb Of God have just unleashed their sixth studio album of eardrum-shredding heaviness, *Resolution*. Expectations were high after the success of the Grammy-nominated *Wrath* (2009), and Chris sounds as ferocious as ever on *Resolution*, displaying his explosive Molotov cocktail of groove, technical chops and relentless intensity. This explosive mix is the result of his constant desire to outdo his past accomplishments and to perform at the very limit of his considerable talents.

## *Going into your sixth album, what did you want to achieve?*

"I don't think the band sat down and came up with a collective dot on the horizon that we were all aiming for but for me personally, and I think it was the case with all the other guys, it was important for us to prove to ourselves that we could still do it and do it better than anybody else. You see all these heritage bands that have been around for a long time - you get to record four, five or six in the catalogue and you just know what to expect. It's not really fresh anymore. For us, as we get older it gets harder and harder to keep up with ourselves in our younger days and it becomes much more difficult to maintain relevance. As we came about there was something fresh to what we were doing, but after 16 years we're not immune to the fact that we're not the new guys anymore and we've got to step it up.

"I knew going into this record that it was important for us to be aware that if it was this re-hashed stuff - or if it was starting to sound like we were doing it for the cheque - then we really should walk away. We don't need to do this anymore and it would be a shame to tarnish the legacy that we've built. If we had to walk away after the last record, *Wrath*, that was fine with me.

"So I really went into it with the leverage of knowing that unless we can beat *Wrath*, we probably shouldn't do anything because that was an important record for us. It did well everywhere around the world and if we had to go out on that note, I would rest easy knowing that the legacy of the band was intact. For me it was important to beat that and I really, honestly think that we did. We've spread our wings farther than we ever have and did some really cool stuff on this where we pushed the limits of our musical abilities and also the limits of what people might expect from us."

## *Do you need a kit that speaks clearly but quickly, playing this music?*

"I love big drums as much as the next guy, but doing what we're doing in speed metal - or whatever you want to call it - it's important to be loud and fast. If everything is going 100 miles an hour you can't sound like John Bonham or it's just going to be a mess."

## *Are there any tracks on the new album where you are pushing your limits as a player?*

"I think almost every song I play on every record has been me at pretty much the top of my abilities. It's fun to live on that edge. It's never comfortable and especially when we take stuff live, I am crossing my fingers and holding my breath for most of the set. I know a lot of people look at me like I'm this very accomplished drummer and all that, but I'm not. I've just been around for a long time and I keep pushing myself way too hard. It's always a crap-shoot whether I'm going to pull it off or not. During pre-production Josh kept referencing, 'You know, we need a drum solo on this record.' I'm like, 'I'm not really a drum solo guy. Every song is kind of a drum solo for me because I'm killing myself just to get to the end of the tune.' He said, 'No, we need a drum solo.' I said, 'Yeah, okay, let's see where that fits,' and I kept blowing it off because I don't want to have this moment where everybody is looking at me. I'm already under enough scrutiny in every other aspect of my life so I don't need that. Then we get into the studio and he's like, 'Let me hear your ideas for this drum solo.' I'm like, 'Oh man, I don't solo.' He said, 'In the home, playing drums by yourself, what are you doing?' So I show him a few of these beats I've been working on, I've been learning some new stuff. He's like, 'Okay, I like that idea. Let's just speed that up by about 100bpm.' So there's a song called 'Desolation' and it begins with a bit of a drum solo. It's a cool syncopated rhythm I had been working on at about one-third of the speed that it is on the record. If you hear me doing that live, you'll know that I'm holding my breath and hoping that God gets me through it."

## *On that note, how do you get through a set playing at that level of intensity?*

"For a long time it felt like a boxing match. I was having a fist fight with my drums every night. I was breaking cylinders every night and going through heads and it was all super-aggressive. That was on our way up and then your set changes from 20 minutes to 30 minutes to 40 minutes as you work your way up the ladder.

"Now we're at 90 minutes and physically it is impossible for anybody to go out there and just rip every single one of the thousands of hits - throwing haymakers at every drum is just not the way to do it. I've had to learn how to be able to play at a high intensity but to build that endurance. Over the past few years, the biggest thing has been: one, to make sure I don't wake up with too bad of a hangover; and two, find the nearest gym and work on cardio to build that endurance. Today I just got home from running 14 miles, so even in our down-time it is important for me to keep up that kind of physical ability to do what we do.

"It sounds like I'm making it out to be really difficult. You slowly come up with it and you learn over time - maybe if I quit smoking it's going to help me get to 30 minutes when you walk off stage and you can't

breathe. Little things like that that you just go through on your way up the ladder. The more successful you get, you start to see that the people around you are really trying to take care of themselves. They are watching what they eat, watching what they drink, not because they are snobby old men but because they have to go out and give 100 percent and they have to do it for longer than the opening bands do. As a young band you see these guys and think they are snooty while you're getting wasted in the dressing room but sooner or later you end up in that spot where you want to give everybody their money's worth - and it takes a lot out of you to do it every night and you've got to take care of yourself. I think I'd be pretty fat and probably a jerk if I didn't play drums. Maybe more of a jerk."

## *When you track, does anyone play with you?*

"Nobody. We have some scratch guitar tracks from pre-production if I need a reference but by the time I go into the studio I feel like it's important for me to make sure I know what I'm doing with or without them. There shouldn't be any real question by the time that red light goes on. At that point you're paying for professional studio time, professional engineers and all that stuff. I don't want to come in and feel like I don't know what I'm doing."

## *So are the rehearsals tough physically? Seven hours is a lot longer than 90 minutes on stage.*

"It's tough. I'm not going 100 miles an hour for seven hours, there is a lot of back and forth with the guitar players teaching each other the riffs and that kind of thing. It is more mentally exhausting really because by the time the drummer's playing, normally everybody knows the song and it takes a long time to get to that point. Most of the time it is me sitting around waiting. There are certainly some intense parts where I'm working on something new that is difficult to play so I have to go over it over and over again and the guys have to suffer through that. It goes both ways but there is enough down-time. There would never be a point other than at the beginning of rehearsal where we are going over the old stuff where I would have to play for more than 90 minutes. Practice is for practise. It doesn't matter if somebody messes up and I don't feel that pressure to perform at my highest capacity. I'm trying out new things, seeing what works and what doesn't, so it's a different vibe." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Lamb Of God

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Lamb Of God *Sacrament* (2006), Lamb Of God *Wrath* (2009)





# Louie Bellson

Big band great Louie Bellson pioneered the use of double bass drums and is still revered by generations of drummers to this day

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**W**hen Louie Bellson arrived in London in 1967 he was greeted with as much excitement and reverence as his old pal Buddy Rich. The drumming fraternity turned out in force to witness Bellson's magical playing and pay homage to the man who had revolutionised the art.

While Buddy came to the UK that year with his own big band, Louie was part of the famed Jazz At The Philharmonic troupe. Bellson's visit provided British fans with a rare opportunity to see the man who had created 'Skin Deep' and 'The Hawk Talks'. When Louie recorded these showcase numbers with the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1952 they created a sensation. 'Skin Deep' is still the ultimate solo, one of the finest ever recorded and a landmark in drumming evolution.

Louie proved a more mellow personality than Buddy Rich, but no less hyperactive. During the day of our interview in London in 1967 he managed to fit in a morning recording session with Britain's top drummer Eric Delaney and an afternoon Rogers drum clinic. He just had time to dash back to the hotel for a meal, before catching a coach to join Dizzy Gillespie for a concert at the Fairfield Hall, Croydon. As I chased after him I realised that everything about Louie Bellson was fast; from his hands and feet to his speech and gait. His daily schedule was so packed with events that he timed them to the last minute.

## A TOWERING FIGURE

During his lifetime he played with most of the jazz legends including Louis Armstrong, Tommy Dorsey, Ella Fitzgerald and Dizzy Gillespie. Although his roots lay in big bands he was adept in small group situations and jam sessions. Much admired by fellow jazz drummers, his brisk technique and bold ideas also appealed to a younger generation of drummers including Peter Erskine, Ginger Baker, Simon Phillips and Steve White.

Louie Bellson was a towering figure but his origins were quite humble. He was born Luigi Balassoni on 6 July, 1924 in Rock Falls, Illinois. His father was an immigrant musician from Naples who ran a music store and young Luigi took the stage name Louie (or 'Louis') Bellson later in life.

He started drumming at the age of three and a half and had lessons with Roy Knapp, who also taught Gene Krupa. He was 15 when he first sketched out an idea for a double bass drum kit in his art class. Bellson famously pioneered the use of double bass drums, which he played with dazzling speed and power. Others also claimed the concept but Louie came up with the idea when he was 15 years old and became the ultimate exponent of a new weapon in the drummer's armoury.

A crescendo of thundering bass drums provided the climax to many of the solos he unleashed during a career that spanned six decades. In 1941 the 17-year-old Louie beat 40,000 contestants to win the 1941 National Slingerland Gene Krupa contest. By 1943 he was

playing in Gene's old band; the Benny Goodman Orchestra. There is a marvellous recording of Louie and Gene engaging in a joint drum solo on 'Don't Be That Way' with the Goodman band during a 1946 radio broadcast. At the end of their deafening fusillades Benny cracks: "And pieces of the ceiling will be falling for days and days..."

## SKIN DEEP

Bellson's finest hour came when he joined Duke Ellington and was featured on the 1952 album *Ellington Uptown*. This premiered his own composition 'Skin Deep', a swinging tune launched with a mighty fanfare. Its success helped revitalise the orchestra's fortunes. The snappy arrangement and highly structured solo raised the stakes for all drummers. The general public loved the excitement it created and Ted Heath's cover version featuring Ronnie Verrell was a UK top 20 hit single in 1954. There was much in Louie's fervent solo to cause sharp intakes of breath. Handclaps and cowbells peppered an astounding climax, greeted by cheers from the band as Louie hit G-force with pounding bass drums, roaring cymbals and a terrifying snare drum roll. It's impossible to listen to the high drama of 'Skin Deep' even now without feeling an emotional uplift. Louie's contribution to Ellington went even further. Arrangements like 'The Mooche' and 'A Tone Parallel To Harlem' brought out the best in Bellson and put his technique to creative use. It's no wonder Duke himself called Louie Bellson: "The world's greatest drummer - and musician."

After leaving Duke, Bellson became musical director for his first wife Pearl Bailey. He led his own big bands and even led Buddy Rich's outfit when Rich became ill. Louie enjoyed working with other drummers and in 1963 teamed up with Gene Krupa for *The Mighty Two*, performing tunes built around drum rudiments. A more violent confrontation was sparked when Buddy Rich and Louie duelled at length on *Are You Ready For This?* - an album recorded in Japan in 1965.

During his trip to London in 1967 he recorded *Repercussion* with his old friend Eric Delaney and it included a new version of 'Skin Deep'. Then in 1970 he made *Louie In London* with a British band performing the 'London Suite'. In 1972 he played at the Talk Of The Town backing his wife Pearl. One of his visitors was a very young Simon Phillips, he remembers: "Louie made me feel so welcome and asked for a chair and sat me down behind his hi-hat. I had the best seat in the house and best music lesson ever. In 1987 we got to play together - one of the highlights of my career."

## HIS FIRST LOVE

Whenever Bellson played he revealed a mastery of snare drum rudiments and a relaxed finger control that lay at the heart of his style. At his clinic sessions Louie would often declare: "A lot of people don't know how to beat the snare drum properly. You've got to raise your

hands to get evenness of sound. You've got to be able to play a perfect long and short roll, or you will form bad habits. Practise with both your right and left hands. A good solo will only come when you are properly equipped. A bad drum solo can be a distracting noise. A good one can be a beautiful communication. When I started I just played snare drum for seven years. All drummers should learn the rudiments first and then they can go on to modern drumming styles."

Louie would also explain how he first devised his revolutionary drum set-up: "I had the idea of using two bass drums in 1946. When I went into a music shop and told the guy what I wanted he told me to 'come back later'. I knew what he meant by 'later'. But I had begun to play rhythms between the single bass drum and hi-hat and wondered what it would sound like with something louder. So I got my two bass drums."

I personally remember Louie once telling me: "Drums are my first love. I am a firm believer in the instrument and its acceptance as something of artistic value. The greatest period in my life was my two years with Duke Ellington. I'd been with lots of big bands over the years like Harry James, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey and Count Basie, but my years with Duke were my greatest association."

"Then I came to London to get married to Pearl Bailey in 1952 and had offers to form my own band. I didn't want to leave the Duke but had to take my chances, otherwise I might have stayed with the Duke for many years."

Although Louie kept up a frantic pace throughout his life there were periods when he was out of the spotlight. British drummer Barriemore Barlowe recalls going into a shop in Los Angeles to buy a bass drum pedal and finding out that the guy serving behind the counter was Louie Bellson - he invited Louie to a Jethro Tull concert as an honoured guest.

Many drummers paid tribute to Louie after his death aged 84 on 14 February, 2009.

Ginger Baker, a great exponent of the double bass drums, summed up the loss felt by the drumming community: "Another great has exited stage left. One of my favourite players of all time. His work with Duke was amazing, one of my big influences for using two bass drums. God bless Louie - you will always be remembered." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich

### CLASSIC CUTS: Duke

*Ellington Uptown* (1952), Louie Bellson *Louie In London* (1970)





# Keith Moon

Rock's most outrageous, infamous and brilliant drummer was a showman, a character and a superb musician as well as an inspiration to generations of players since

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

It's something of a mystery how the UK produced not only the most imitated rock drummer of all time – John Henry Bonham – but also the most *inimitable*, Keith John Moon. Keith's outrageous behaviour often overshadows his musical reputation, but we won't revisit the tired old stories and half-truths here. But it goes without saying his eccentric and sometimes shocking behaviour massively informed his drumming style. It's a chicken-and-egg thing. Keith was well on his way to becoming the most eccentric drummer around when he joined The Who – and the band turned out to be the perfect platform for him to develop this side of his musicality. It's a cliché to talk of one-of-a-kind, but in Moon's case it's accurate.

In 1995 Keith's childhood drumming friend Gerry Evans told me, "He was definitely a little bit strange, you see it a lot now with hyperactive kids, but he was like that back then. If you went into a fish and chip shop he had to pour vinegar over someone's head."

Gerry worked at Drum City in London's West End. "It got so bad," he remembered, "I used to say to the guy in the shop, if my mate Keith comes tell him I've gone. And when he got on the drum kit he played like a maniac, but the ironic thing was it turned out so

gone down in rock-lore as the original and craziest.

Keith was, like all British teenagers, in thrall to the glamour of the USA. Every Brit drummer envied Sandy Nelson who had worldwide drum solo hit records with 'Teen Beat' (1959) and 'Let There Be Drums' (1961). Pop drummers of the early '60s were often expected to take a solo and it would invariably incorporate a swinging, tuneful Nelson-like tom fest, a style which ultimately goes right back to Gene Krupa on Benny Goodman's 'Sing, Sing, Sing' of 1937. It would take Ginger Baker's 'Toad' in 1966 to finally change all that. But before that, the USA's Krupa was the most idolised drum soloist ever and Keith was mesmerised by his showmanship and charisma. Today, watching clips of Krupa in his prime alongside those of Moon, it is amazing how alike they are – with the same hunched-over and wide-eyed, gurning, flailing delivery. For 30 years drummers had copied Krupa's licks, but Keith stole his act.

Added to this was Keith's love of the Californian surf music scene, so much at odds with Britain's post-war austerity. Surf music was bright and breezy, characterised by the novel, heavily reverbed electric guitar and raw, tribal drumming. In 1962 the Surfaris, with Ron Wilson on drums, had the biggest drum solo

was a highly skilled all-round percussionist, with a serious jazz background, but he became better known as a spectacular showman.

## THE SWINGING SIXTIES

It is almost impossible now to take in just how quickly things moved and changed throughout the 1960s. The Beatles broke through in 1963 followed by a host of innocuous and largely consigned-to-history Merseybeat groups. Newcastle's Animals and London's Rolling Stones followed up in 1964 with grittier sounds based on blues and r'n'b. Keith joined The Who in 1964 and the band's first hit was in January 1965 with 'I Can't Explain'. It was obvious from the beginning that The Who was more than just a noisy, alternative pop group. And by the time of 'My Generation' (late '65) – perhaps the greatest anthem of the '60s – Moon had already cemented a place in drumming history. The unrelenting triplet assault that closes 'Generation' left drummers, and everyone else, properly gobsmacked.

Moon was in stunning contrast to nearly all the other pop group drummers. Most found it enough to carry the beat, playing in what seems now a remarkably subdued manner. The more musically significant players – Ringo Starr and Charlie Watts, even the Hollies' revered Bobby Elliott – were a million miles from Moon and gave no warning of Moon's imminent arrival. Keith simply exploded (as did The Who) with a wholly different attitude to pop and how it might be played. In a word, The Who changed pop into rock. Although The Who had chart hits and would continue to have them for several years (when the rock bands who followed simply gave up and made albums), still The Who was a rock band and not a pop group. Not only a rock band but way the most anarchic rock band, so massively more boisterous and violent than any other band at the time that it is not absurd to say they pre-dated punk by more than a decade. Except they were far too musical and expert to be labelled as punks.

From the mid-'60s Moon held a special position in a triumvirate of extraordinary UK drummers alongside Ginger Baker and Mitch Mitchell. Baker had been around much longer and was already well known and respected on the jazz/r'n'b scene. Mitchell had played with Georgie Fame's r'n'b band and was a busy session drummer, pre-Hendrix. Both Baker and Mitchell were highly skilled players who studied the instrument seriously. There is no indication that Moon ever studied in depth. And yet it was obvious from the beginning that he had a special talent for percussion. He would never have the sort of temperament to practise the instrument seriously. In this sense he is separated from other talented UK drummers who followed and all of whom strove to improve themselves technically. Indeed Keith's is one of those rare instances where you sense any technical improvement in his approach would have spoiled it. His drumming was a genuine one-off that somehow worked and was the heart of The Who. Bob

## MOON APPROACHED THE DRUMS AS A TOOL FOR CONVERSATION, FOR CONFRONTATION, FOR DRAMA, HUMOUR AND OUTRAGE

good! Which I could never get over, because for me, I've got this delinquent friend I'm trying to make excuses for and the next minute he's doing the Isle of Wight Festival!"

## ROCK'N'ROLL RAVER

Why this innocent looking, doe-eyed boy from an ordinary suburban family turned into the world's most notorious showman-clown is a mystery. Not even Tony Fletcher in his monumental biography of Moon (*Dear Boy*, 1998) can explain it. There seems to have been no precedent in his quiet working class family. He was encouraged, or at least tolerated, by the rest of The Who, who were no mean ravers in their own right.

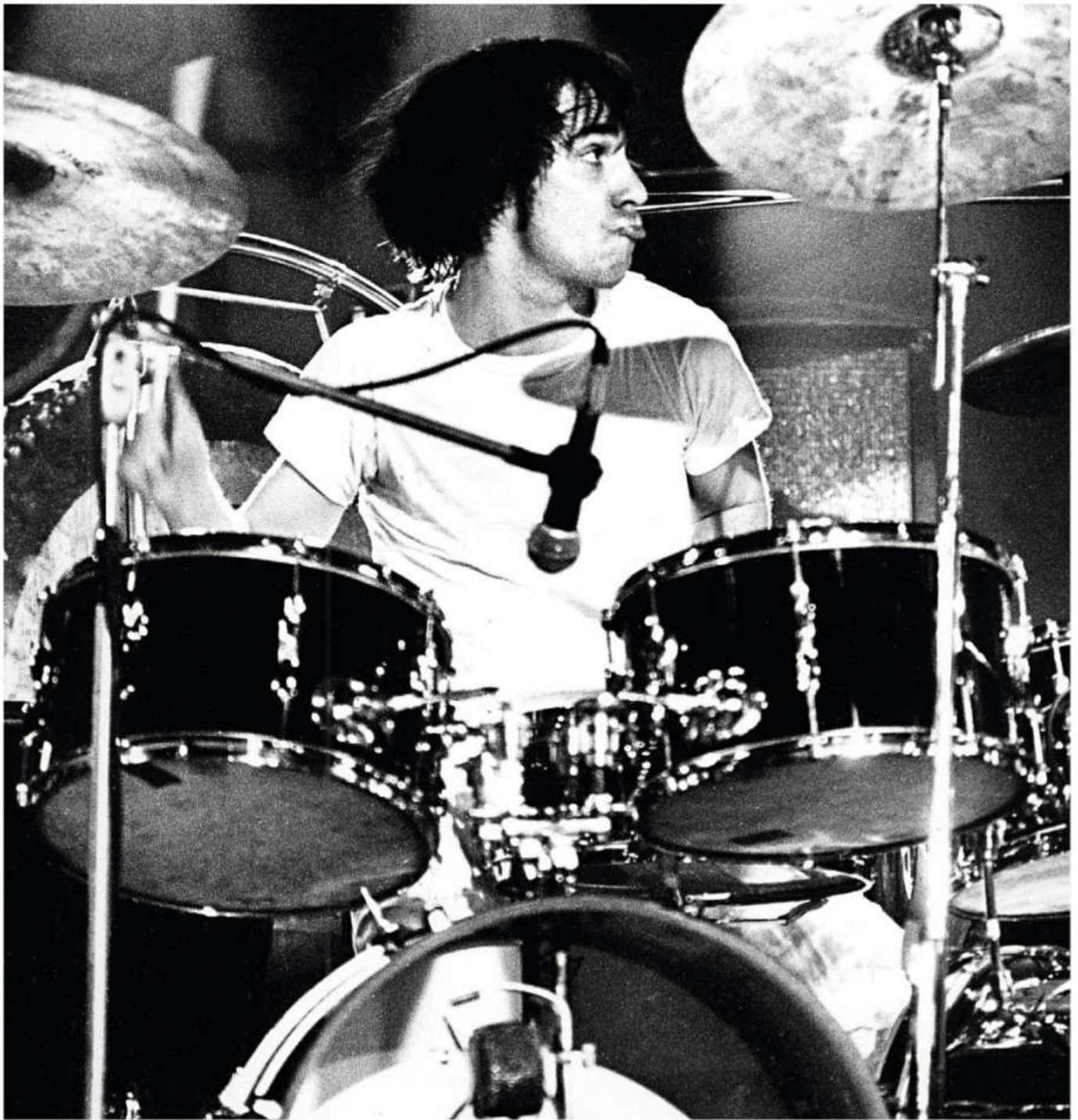
Keith's flouting of authority and convention was in part an extension of the mood which had gradually been fomenting over the previous decade. The '50s rock'n'roll revolution may seem tame now, but you have to measure Elvis and Little Richard against the prevailing pop of the time – a sorry and largely vacuous mixture of Perry Como, Doris Day, Conway Twitty and Guy Mitchell. Rock'n'roll excess, when it came, was something UK musicians took to like fish to water. It exploded in the '60s when British youth found a voice and grabbed freedoms they had never experienced in history. Moon was not alone by any means, but he's

hit ever with 'Wipeout'. To this day it is the lay public's contention that if you can bash out the rhythm to 'Wipeout' on a table top you must be a talented drummer. The continuous single-stroke 16th notes of 'Wipeout' made a lasting impression on Keith's style.

There were UK influences too. London threw up some pretty zany rock'n'rollers in the early '60s. On Keith's patch in the north west London vicinity of Wembley, Screaming Lord Sutch and The Savages were the craziest act and Sutch had Carlo Little on drums. For the time Carlo was a bruiser of a player with a bass drum "like a cannon" (according to Gerry Evans) and it would seem he was the only drummer Keith ever sought out for lessons, or at least tips and pointers on his swift teenage ascent.

So far as the pop groups of the early '60s were concerned the Shadows' Tony Meehan and Brian Bennett were both held in high regard and Meehan enjoyed a couple of classy drum solo hits in the Sandy Nelson vein. Like all the UK '60s drummers Keith played with a natural swing, though it's doubtful he paid too much attention to jazz *per se*. Still, he saw Eric Delaney on the TV, perhaps on one of his three Royal Command appearances at the London Palladium. Eric had played double bass drums since the mid-1950s, inspired by the USA's Louie Bellson. He





Redferns

Henrit (Argent, Kinks) testifies to the fact that when Keith sat in at the Speakeasy he still played like he was in The Who. John Entwistle said that whenever the band had a few months off Keith would have to re-learn how to play when they got back together. He barely knew what he was doing, everything he did was in response to those around him. And that is the key to his style.

### PRACTICAL JOKER

It has been said that Moon's was a soloing style, but this is not really true. Unlike Baker he couldn't solo for toffee. Nor did he aspire to. It was not in his nature to explore solo licks and techniques. Although he certainly wanted to be in the front line and noticed, it was in the context of the band. He craved attention but he achieved this by bouncing off others, playing practical jokes, indulging in banter. And this was how he approached the drums. As a tool for conversation, for

confrontation, for drama, humour and outrage.

This is what made him a musical player, even though it may often have looked chaotic. No one said that art should be tame, or easy, or respectful. As Townshend's skill as a songwriter developed, The Who produced a series of brilliantly original and quirky singles which nonetheless managed to be commercially appealing. And a big part of that appeal was Moon's unorthodox, operatic drumming. He could provide one hell of a beat when needed, but as often he would indulge in a running commentary with expletives, full stops and questions. Townshend constructed strange stories with his songs and Moon helped bring them dramatically to life.

Although he didn't solo, right from the first album, *My Generation* (1965), Keith was not afraid to lead, to jump in and make robust statements whenever he could. Since Pete Townshend did not take conventional melodic guitar solos but instead manipulated feedback

and effects, Keith had space to be creative and avant garde too. And let's remember that John Entwistle was not your conventional bass player, but equally as original on his instrument as the other two. This all meant that Keith could indulge in his trademark syncopated beats and incendiary build-ups.

An early example of this is on the 1965 single, 'Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere'. Keith plays relatively conventionally for the verse/chorus and then when it comes to the bridge he changes to a syncopated tom and snare pattern leading to an eighth-note bass drum ostinato over which he improvises rippling fills rising and falling with Townshend's guitar histrionics. By dropping the normal backbeat Keith created space, tension and suspense - musical characteristics not usually associated with loud rock. Keith and The Who became the absolute masters at this and no other rock band has equalled the bruising drama that The Who would go on to create in

their albums and live shows. Such extremes of dynamics, from a whisper to a roar, are associated more with classical orchestras and this ability served The Who perfectly in their future adoption of rock 'opera'.

Keith simply would not be kept down and rather than supply a steady backbeat he was always straining to be there in the frontline. Most often this would mean engaging with Townshend's guitar. Moon had utmost respect for his band's leader and the two developed one of the closest on-stage double acts - egging one another on. Townshend's windmilling guitar often conducts Moon, keeping the volatile drummer in line. But Keith would also play off Entwistle and Daltrey.

### MOON ON RECORD

Nonetheless, the visual image of Keith's chaotic approach to drumming is belied if we listen to the recordings, which often show a surprisingly tight and able player. Much has been made of the fact that Keith largely couldn't be doing with the hi-hat and spent most of his career belting his crash-rides. On 'I Can't Explain', recorded in late 1964 (the angular riff a direct response to the Kinks' 'You Really Got Me'), Keith gives us a strict Bobby Elliott-style hi-hat groove and crisp backbeat, with even more drive. He plays with discipline and good time (if right on the front of the beat), more urgent than (ace session man) Bobby Graham on 'You Really Got Me'.

Keith also gives a disciplined performance on 'The Kids Are Alright' (1966), again starting with solid hi-hat and Tamla-style fours on the snare. There is a short variation on his stuttering, Phil Spector-ish middle-eight trick, out of which he simply bursts with a furious 16th-note triplet break, a tricky and dangerous move on a single session. Mitch Mitchell picked up on this and would use frantic 16th-note triplets all over his Hendrix recordings. Mitch would surely never have been so florid if Keith had not already opened up the field. And whereas with Keith it was so obviously his nature, like an over-excited puppy, with Mitch you know it was more a calculated decision, albeit it a great one.

Although Ox is bassist John Entwistle's nickname, Keith's bravura performance on 'The Ox' (from *My Generation*) steals the day. This is the Surfari's surf-instrumental given The Who treatment, transformed from the hedonistic beaches of California into a scarily apocalyptic barrage. 'The Ox' sums up The Who's instrumental transformation of innocent pop into dangerous rock as well as anything they ever did.

In the exuberance of the first album there are mistakes, but Keith got better quickly with non-stop touring and international success. His unique style reaches an early peak on two landmark singles - 'Happy Jack' (1966) and 'I Can See For Miles' (1967). 'Jack' displays Keith's fun side. There is no suggestion whatever of a normal, steady backbeat - the song is punctuated with stop-start timpani-style figures which roll with the guitar riffs and melodic lines. The performance is so composed - you could say orchestral. On 'Miles' Keith reaches the summit of his swooping and sustained crescendo trademark. He plays almost continuous 16th notes through the verses, stopping to crash on the bridge accents before roaring off on the singles again - building to the best, most suspenseful crescendo in rock-single history. It makes perfect musical sense, but again you cannot imagine anyone else daring to go this route, much less pulling it off.

By the end of the '60s The Who had cemented their position as the best live rock band around, as forever attested on the 1970 album *Live At Leeds*. Back from



Redferns

## FROM THE START KEITH WAS NOT AFRAID TO LEAD, TO JUMP IN AND MAKE ROBUST STATEMENTS WHENEVER HE COULD

touring the USA to large crowds the band tore it up on the UK university circuit. I was lucky enough to see The Who at Nottingham University, two months after the Leeds recording, and this remains the greatest performance by a rock band I have ever seen. Daltrey was spine-tingling while the three instrumentalists were all ground-breaking originals on their instruments. Moon was a dervish, a dynamo, a revelation. Today's rockers play harder and are more accurate, but that can never diminish the energy that Keith brought to his work. John Entwistle said that when he and Moon first heard the album back they were blown away, they just hadn't realised they were that good.

### AHEAD OF HIS TIME

And yet there was more to come. One of Keith's more unexpected achievements occurred when he became the first major rock drummer to feature on record and stage playing along to sequenced (organ and synth) tracks. The epic 'Baba O' Riley' and 'Won't Get Fooled Again' appeared on *Who's Next* in 1971, a good 10 years before most other drummers encountered sequenced backings. Ironically, this put Moon - the most unruly of drummers - at the cutting edge again. Keith resorted to headphones gaffer-taped to his head (well, of course) in order to play along in time. He was almost a decade ahead of other rock drummers, who would mostly not have to cope with click tracks until the 1980s. It also caused him to simplify his drumming and 'Won't Get Fooled Again' contains some of Keith's most powerful and conventional stadium rock drumming. The massive fills after seven minutes heralding Daltrey's climactic scream are as thrilling as anything The Who/Moon ever laid down. The virtuoso studio veteran Simon Phillips,

who toured with The Who after Keith's death, has testified to the supreme difficulty of staying in time with those analogue tapes which, unlike today's computer-generated clicks, stray from strict tempo.

There would be more from Moon during the '70s, and John Entwistle is quoted in *Dear Boy* as stating that, against all expectations and forebodings, the final US tour in 1976 was the best The Who and Keith ever played. Yet throughout the latter years up to his death in 1978 life became a constant struggle for Moon to remain functioning as a drummer while indulging more and more in his alter ego as a drink and drug-crazed celebrity with a reputation that preceded him. One day he was a charming and amusing friend, the next a booze-sodden, potentially hazardous pest.

For now let's just remember Moon as the wonderful drummer and artist - "the supreme melodramatist, the most spontaneous and unpredictable drummer in rock", as Townshend described him soon after his death. For a dozen glorious years Keith's work was the exuberant expression of a lad with too much energy, a huge appetite for life and an extraordinary, passionate talent for music. **R**

### ESSENTIALS



#### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Who  
**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Who  
*My Generation* (1965),  
The Who *Live At Leeds*  
(1970), The Who *Who's Next* (1971)



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# Peter Erskine

One of the world's finest drum educators, having made his name with Weather Report, Steely Dan and artists such as Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**W**hen Peter Erskine first came to London in 1973 with avowed giants of progressive jazz The Stan Kenton Orchestra, he was hailed as a teenage drum sensation. Peter was thrilled at the adventure of discovering a new city, new audiences and the chance to play with a legendary bandleader. This writer interviewed him on that first visit to London and wrote about his dynamic playing with the Kenton band, which had a long tradition of using only the finest drummers, from Shelly Manne to Mel Lewis. Peter still retains his enthusiasm for drumming, playing with the best musicians and, of course, revisiting England.

A few years after our first meeting I spoke to Peter again in Paris, where he was playing with Jaco Pastorius, Wayne Shorter and Joe Zawinul in Weather Report. By 1978 he had drastically changed his style to adapt to the demands of fusion rock. He was playing much louder and harder as the music demanded. In recent years, however, he has returned to swing, playing in a more relaxed style while retaining his creativity and drive. It is Erskine's unique blend of skills, honed over a lifetime of playing, that has made him so much in demand to accompany singers from Joni Mitchell to Kate Bush and Diana Krall. He has also toured and recorded with Steely Dan and a wide variety of jazz musicians, radio big bands and classical orchestras. Remarkably, he has played on over 500 albums and film scores and won two Grammy Awards.

In recent years Peter has also developed his role as an educator. He's the author of several books, including *Drumset Essentials: Volumes 1 to 3* and *The Erskine Method*, and has taught at the University Of Southern California and Royal Academy in London.

## Hi Peter. Do you remember the interview we did 35 years ago for *Melody Maker*?

"I certainly do. I was touring with the Stan Kenton Orchestra. It was the first time I'd had my picture in print for an interview, and I was very excited and bought several copies of the paper. The article you wrote had a photo caption about a 'fly wheel effect'. I think I was talking about a physical way of playing where once the arms start moving they achieve a kind of constant, perpetual motion. I now preach quite the opposite. Timekeeping is really best when it's internalised, we're seated very relaxed at our instrument and our forward limbs are free to do anything we want, not locked into keeping time. The time isn't in my forearm, it's in my chest or my gut."

## What was your introduction to drumming, and how did you get into jazz?

"I had started playing on a makeshift kit aged four, playing along to my dad's records. He was a bass player and later became a psychiatrist. I don't know if I was the result of a grand experiment but I shared the same interests as he did. I grew up in a house with

tremendous support and they put up with me practising drums at all hours. I had drum lessons from the age of five and was later sent to one of Stan Kenton's summer camps for young musicians. The first was in 1961. My parents drove for two days to take me there from New Jersey to Indiana in the days before interstate highways. I was seven years old and other students at the camp included Keith Jarrett, David Sanborn and Randy Brecker. We were snapped in a group photograph. It was incredible.

"When The Beatles came along in 1964 and Beatlemania was sweeping the country, my parents took a trip to New York City. I asked them to find me a Beatles record. Guess what my father brought home instead? It was *A Love Supreme* by John Coltrane. After that I used to fantasise what it would be like if Elvin Jones played with The Beatles."

## Didn't you play in pop groups?

"Sure. My group was entered in a talent show for a scouting organisation. None of the other kids could play. But I bought a Beatles wig and we all sang, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah!' I was also taking piano lessons and played keyboards in a couple of rock bands in the mid-'60s. I had a Farfisa, where the colours of the keyboard were reversed. We were doing Dave Clark Five hits.

"But while I was growing up I'd see some jazz on TV and, of course, all the latest rock music. Everything was new in the '60s. The music was asking a lot of questions about society, and now music doesn't seem to be doing that. Music then pretended like it knew the answers and now everybody acts like they know the answers."

## Was jazz taught in college in the '60s?

"Well, it was the early days of jazz education. At university you still couldn't use the term 'jazz' - it was a dirty word. You had to use euphemisms like 'stage band.' By the time I was 18, Stan Kenton thought it would be a cool idea for me to play in his band. We played quite a few concerts in England in January 1973, including a stint at Ronnie Scott's. It was my first trip out of the US and I loved just walking around London in the morning after a gig and seeing all the sights."

## You joined Weather Report in the late '70s. What was it like working with Joe Zawinul, their genius composer and keyboard player?

"Joe was a demanding musical colleague as well as band leader. Weather Report really cared about the music and we had post-mortem discussions after every gig. Joe taught me always to compose when I play. Jaco Pastorius and me were the youngest members of the group and felt like kids next to Joe and Wayne Shorter. I learned a huge amount from them both."

## You've set up your own label, Fuzzy Music. Is that the future for musicians?

"I released the CDs on my own label because it's better

to have a label rather than scheduling a meeting with some guy in a turtle-neck sweater and begging him, 'Can I please record this music?' If you do it yourself you don't have to convince anybody. It's been a tabletop operation all along: orders come in, we package them up. More people are downloading our music, but some people still like CDs.

"The *Standards* album is a lovely recording of some beautiful tunes, and complements the Norrbotten Big Band CD. The band is based in Sweden and has terrific players like trumpeter Tim Hagans, who does a lot of blowing and most of the writing. It was the best trumpet playing I'd heard in years. He's the cat but he's so modest. We thought it would be good fun to release both albums at the same time. One is wild, woolly and loud, and I get a chance to flex some muscles, whereas *Standards* shows a much more restrained, disciplined approach."

## You teach drumming at the University Of Southern California. Are you aiming to spend less time on the road now?

"It gets hectic on the road and I'm trying to stay home more, which is why I'm pursuing the university gig. We have Drum Set Proficiency as part of a degree programme. Roland has supplied us with a whole classroom of V-drum kits and we have acoustic DW kits as well. Part of the duty of being a musician is passing along information. I'm writing books too - there's never a dull moment around here!"

## What's the special drumming philosophy that you teach your students?

"The drummer should create a counterbalance to what's going on by using dynamics and texture. He should make the music bubble and dance. Drummers also have to tell a story. I tell my students, 'With your right hand, create a narrative. We know how to play a beat, how to play sticks and pedals - now let's start telling a story with an unbroken line.' That's when drumming becomes interesting to me. You hear that style of playing in Elvin Jones, and I hope you can hear it in mine. You should be aware of a melody and a harmony. Drumming is a three-dimensional chess game. It's architecture. End of analogy!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Weather Report, Steely Dan, Joni Mitchell, Stan Kenton Orchestra

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Weather Report *Night Passage* (1980),  
Weather Report *Weather Report* (1982),  
Joni Mitchell *Mingus* (1979)





# Thomas Lang & Benny Greb

Two of the world's best known technical maestros and drum educators share their secrets with *Rhythm*. Take a seat, class is in session...

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**T**homas Lang raised the bar for drummers everywhere with his two hit DVDs, *Creative Control* and *Creative Coordination And Advanced Foot Technique*. His solo performances are dazzling and he is in constant demand as a session player, in addition to working as both a producer and writer in LA.

Benny Greb's *The Language Of Drumming: A System For Musical Expression* DVD is a showcase for his ability to make music with the drums. When *Rhythm* spoke to Benny he had just returned from a huge clinic tour of Asia, spreading his philosophy across the globe.

Both Benny and Thomas possess the enviable ability to turn their hands and feet to a huge range of musical styles, from jazz and fusion to rock and pop and make it all look so easy in the process.

So, when *Rhythm* got face-to-face with these two masters of the kit, we wanted to find out the secrets of their technique and get some handy tips and tricks that *Rhythm* readers can apply to their drumming.

## What's the most common mistake people make when setting up their drums?

**Thomas:** "To set the drums up for the viewer so it looks cool from the front rather than for yourself. I know a lot of young drummers make that mistake. Number two would be to set the drums up so that the bass drum is facing the audience straight on, rather than being off to the right if you are a right-handed drummer, because the bass drum is not the centre of the drumset. Number three is to try to make the drumset perfectly symmetrical. Another is to sit too low or too high, or to set up the cymbals too far away from you so you have to play with your arm completely stretched - I see that a lot. Whatever you do with your body mechanically has to be within a spherical space. It's not a straight plane, you're moving within a spherical space and your set-up has to reflect that, so whatever is higher on the drumset has to be closer to you."

## What are the pros and cons of traditional versus matched grip?

**Benny:** "The thing is that you can't do everything with one grip, it's not possible, so you need these different grips to do different things. You can't do any accents with finger technique, you need the wrist, you need the Moeller technique."

**Thomas:** "I think the strength of traditional is that it's an asymmetrical grip and it affects the way you think. The asymmetry of the grip lends itself to asymmetrical thinking and therefore playing, a bit like playing the guitar where the left hand is on the fretboard and doing something completely independent from the right hand which is strumming, but together the two hands produce one sound. I look at playing traditional grip the same way where the two hands use two completely different techniques - one hand from underneath the stick, the right hand from on top so

there is a push-pull dynamic in your upper body. Matched grip is more powerful, it's more balanced. You have better reach with matched grip. It causes fewer injuries - traditional grip causes a lot of bruises, abrasions, chafing, all sorts of issues. It lends itself to a more ambidextrous style with open-handed playing, which would be awkward using traditional grip."

## Are there any shortcuts for fast double-kick playing or is it just a question of practice?

**Benny:** "There is this thing, practice makes perfect, which is not right. *Perfect practice* makes perfect. You can practise in the wrong way forever without getting any results. We sometimes try harder at things - 'I have to play more, I have to practise harder, I have to practise longer.' Sometimes it takes us too long to think, 'Okay, it's not practising longer, I should try it differently.' With a car it's what baggage can you drop off to make it run faster? If you can't equip the car with a better motor and you want to go faster, you have to drop weight. In your motion and your technique, it's not about equipping yourself with more fancy stuff, it's getting rid of all the excess stuff you don't need."

**Thomas:** "For speed you must compromise volume. You can't play ultra-fast and ultra-loud at the same time. I make a compromise by playing loud and when it starts getting weak and wimpy I stop because I can play faster but at a certain speed you lose volume. There are ways to make it easier but to achieve powerful single-stroke rolls or double-stroke rolls on the bass drum requires intense, focussed bass drum practice. If you stick to it you'll be able to execute powerful, beefy double and single strokes at a fast tempo upwards of 200bpm that can be played on any acoustic drum and work in any playing situation without trigger mics."

## Do you think in terms of technique when coming up with fills?

**Thomas:** "Never, no. I try to avoid fills. I only play them if I am prompted or the producer demands it. I try to stay out of the groove's way. A groove is a repetitive cycle that only works after a certain amount of repetitions. It's that cycle that comes around that creates the magic. As soon as you play a fill or change the cycle it kind of ruins it."

**Benny:** "With fills you try to make them as groovy as the grooves, like groove variations rather than 'fills', like to fill some beats in. With Steve Gadd, you don't even know that he's playing a fill. It's a different groove in bar four or something. Sometimes drummers change everything, they change body posture, stop breathing for one bar, change their technique, focus more on the pattern. They change everything but they expect that the time feel shouldn't change. That doesn't make any sense. You have to have one consistent thing and it should be the quarter-note pulse. If you focus on that, the chances are quite high that you'll have that flow to whatever you play, which is a mental technique."

## Any good techniques to improve time-keeping?

**Benny:** "You have to be aware of the quarter-note pulse. Whenever I have a timing problem I go back into the practice room, try it out and sing the quarter-note to it. Then in the future it really sounds great."

**Thomas:** "If you can remember tempo then you are less likely to speed up or slow down. That can be achieved by association and muscle memory. The best way to do it is to combine the two. Association, meaning you have a song in your mind. You know this Police song is at 115bpm or this Kings Of Leon tune is at 150bpm. You sing the song, it only takes you about five seconds to sing a chorus and pretty much nail a tempo. That's association, then at the same time you have a muscle memory component. It's necessary for every musician to be able to learn tempos by heart. If you ask me to play 72bpm, I can nail it. It's a learned skill that anybody can do. It's easy to nail 60bpm because everybody has a watch, but if you have 60bpm you always have the double-time and the half-time."

## Is there any danger you can take the pursuit of technical excellence too far?

**Benny:** "Technique should be a tool that you use for something. Sometimes I see people who practise technique and then they have this monstrous tool that is very dangerous if used unwisely. [It's like] if you go to a doctor that is very good at open heart surgery but you only have a cold and he cuts you open because he wants to prove to you how good he is. We need to have an ethical code like doctors that it's good to do what's necessary with technique and with our knowledge and not always good to do what you can do."

**Thomas:** "To say that technical music is not musical is saying Mozart and Chopin aren't musical. Technique often makes music. Zappa is not musical? Tony Williams isn't musical? It's always people who have no technique that say they don't need technique to play the drums. Technique is a tool. You use it for certain activities. You need a hammer to drive a nail into a wall. You can use a hammer to chop wood, it will take longer and it won't be a straight edge. Why not use the right tool? If you can acquire [technique], it will make playing easier." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Thomas Lang: stOrk, Falco, Robert Fripp; Benny Greb: Blue Touch Paper

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Thomas Lang *Creative Control* (DVD), *Creative Coordination And*

*Advanced Foot Technique* (DVD); Benny Greb *The Language Of Drumming: A System For Musical Expression* (DVD)





# Danny Carey

A master of polyrhythm and tribal beats, Carey's contribution to the music of Tool has seen him lauded by rock drummers ever since

WORDS: JON COHAN

**D**anny Carey helped redefine the rock drummer's role in the '90s by playing complex polyrhythms and odd-meter beats over the dark and haunting melodies that became Tool's signature sound. A classically trained but inherently rebellious musician, Carey uses his drums and sampled percussion to add colour and emotion to Tool's music. On each new record he pushes the envelope of drumming that little bit further, beyond the constraints of the timekeeping accompanist, shying away from the traditional kick, snare, and hi-hat-based beats in favour of using the toms and triggered sounds to set up melodic rhythmic patterns.

## Take us through the evolution of a Tool song...

"They're all bits and pieces. We just turn the two-track recorder on and jam. I'll come in with a beat sometimes or Adam [Jones, guitarist] will come in with a guitar riff or Justin [Chancellor, bass] will come in with a bass line and we just stretch them as far as we can. Sometimes we jam on these things for hours or even days. Then, after we log hours and hours on all these different riffs we just go back and find the little jewels that pop up along the way. Sometimes it's the mistakes that are the coolest things. Then we figure out which ones fit together and we start using those as building blocks."

## Given the complicated arrangements of Tool songs, is it ever difficult to take what you do on record and transfer it to the stage for live shows?

"Not really, because we start out doing it all live when we write the songs. When we record it, it's about capturing what we've already nailed in rehearsals and getting a good take. So we don't have to worry about transferring it to a live show, we just have to remember what we did!"

## Tool don't seem to be a band who fall neatly into any specific genre or label...

"It seems like you have to put a label on it in some way or another, but it is what it is. To me, the beauty of it is that it still sounds like the four of us doing our thing. If you're true to that chemistry then it will work. I've noticed since we did the last record, in the last four or five years, I hear so much stuff on the radio that's all done to click tracks, and we've never done that. It's funny because I can hear myself rushing or dragging sometimes, but at least the energy is there. It's okay if it breathes or moves around - it gives a different life to it. I'm just glad we never do anything to a click."

## You say that your tempos are all over the place, but you seem to have really good time...

"Well, it's not just me, Adam and Justin have really good time too. That allows me the freedom to push and pull things and put that personality into it that creates a feel that goes beyond a metronome. It's cool when it gets heavy or slower when it comes to a chorus, or it speeds

up on an intricate part of a verse. There's parts where I cringe when I hear it, but the pay-off is that energy that you would never get if we were playing to a click."

## People say they hear a lot of Bill Bruford's influence in your playing...

"I did like the way he was conservative with his cymbals, because they do tend to eat the high-end up. It's nice when you use them the right way. I always had a lot of respect for him and how he showed reserve in that way - it wasn't taking anything away from the guitarist and bass player's attack and their accents when he played more rhythmic beats on the toms rather than riding on the cymbals all the time. It's a neat effect and the beauty of it is that when you finally do go to the cymbals, it sounds huge."

"It's kind of the same thing that I do with the snare drum. I like starting with the snares off because when it gets to the chorus and I flip them on it suddenly just goes somewhere and it means something, rather than just having it there all the time. I like to try to be conscious of my tambour and be sensitive of the space I'm taking up with the other players. When you are just bashing away at the cymbals all the time it is taking away other people's accents."

## Do you guys share a lot of musical influences?

"No, it's really a huge variety. Everyone is different, so when we come together, we have this meeting point. It's pretty eclectic as far as all the different influences coming in go, and I think that what you hear is a lot of variety and that we give each other the space to express those weird idiosyncrasies. It gives us the capacity to go places that other people wouldn't go."

"I was definitely the prog-rock, fusion dude. When I grew up I was into Billy Cobham and Lenny White and I'd listen to Miles Davis and Tony Williams. I was kicking the big band in high school and college. I played in the school band and I did go on to college to the University of Missouri at Kansas City. It was more of a legit school - they almost kind of frowned at the jazz program there. They looked down their noses at you. They were trying to prep people to be in the Kansas City Philharmonic or the Boston Pops, but I just wanted to rock, so I don't regret all that training. The thing is, when you're exposed to classical training and you analyse all that stuff it gives you a lot broader palette of arrangement ideas. I think if anything, what I gained from going to school all those years was a sense of arrangement and a sense of how a song needs to develop and build and get to the point where it transports someone from point A to point B, so it's not just some linear mumbo jumbo."

## Do you ever write out any of your parts?

"Very rarely. We rehearse everything so many times there's no need to write anything down. It's like muscle memory by the time we record it."

## You have a reputation among drummers for playing in odd time signatures and making them work. Is that something you set out to do?

"It's more a function of the whole band in a way. I mean Justin and Adam, those guys come up with some freaky stuff, and I'm comfortable with that. I don't ever try to bend them into a 4/4 thing. I'm cool with playing in weird time. When I was a little kid, my dad would play Ravi Shankar records or play classical stuff. There was always a lot of Stravinsky and this weird time stuff going on, and then in the '70s when the fusion stuff hit, like with Cobham, a lot of it was in different signatures. I always liked the balance of odd time, or the jerk of odd time. Once it gets internalised it does feel sort of natural and that's the goal - to make it groove."

"Maynard [James Keenan, Tool vocalist] is the one who always just kills me on our stuff. The original riffs can be so weird and then I try to find a basic thing to sort of make it swing and sound like it's not in odd time, but then he will come in with a vocal melody that's so simple over the top of what we've written. To me that's the most genius thing and the hardest thing to do - to be able to simplify something like that. He kills me every time. It's a pleasure to do business with him!"

## When the songs are progressing during the rehearsing and writing, does your choice of instrument or voicing you're going to use change from song to song?

"Oh definitely; it changes from verse to chorus or even from bar to bar. The beauty is that my palette of sounds has expanded so vastly now that I have this new system, so I just try to be true and do justice to the musical moments that happen when the four of us get in that room together. And not just beat-wise - I'm trying to play the songs, I'm trying to offer something texturally, so if all of a sudden I hear some weird, ringy overtone Tibetan gong over this thing then I'll go there. Or if I'd rather have a huge ethnic American Indian drum, then I'll go there."

"It's about the texture thing for me now more than anything else. I feel that's how I can contribute beyond doing just beats or something. I'm always trying to push my drumming in that way, more than playing some fancy beat or something. I think that's how I've improved my playing a little bit on this record compared to the last one. I think I'm playing the songs more than I'm playing the beats." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Tool

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Tool *Undertow* (1993), Tool *Lateralus* (2001)







# Phil Collins

Beyond his multi-million selling pop singing career, the Genesis man's contribution to drumming cannot be understated. Cue massive 'In The Air Tonight' drum fill for Mr Phil Collins...

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**T**he wider world knows Phil Collins as the singer who sold 100 million albums, won seven Grammys and has been a successful composer, band leader, producer and actor. But as a drummer he has been a source of innovation since his earliest days. Whether playing progressive stadium rock with Genesis, fusion with Brand X or swing with his Big Band, Collins has displayed a masterful technique and overwhelming passion for playing. From blitzing duets with drum partner Chester Thompson to unleashing that iconic break on 'In The Air Tonight', Phil has made a huge contribution and ensured drumming gained the respect and status it deserves.

## A PASSION FOR DRUMMING

Collins made an instant impact when he joined Genesis in 1970. He played on their 1971 album *Nursery Cryme* but his career had begun much earlier. A child actor, he appeared as an extra in the Beatles movie *A Hard Day's Night* and The Artful Dodger in the London stage production of *Oliver!* But his passion for drumming started when he was even younger. He was given a toy set at the age of five, and by 16 Phil was gigging with lots of groups including the Cliff Charles Blues Band. He fostered his love of rock music by going to as many gigs as possible, usually by The Who and The Action, and continued his musical education at the Marquee after school, where he even helped sweep the floors. After stints in The Herd and Flaming Youth, Phil spotted an advert in *Melody Maker* and auditioned for Genesis, in time to play on their mega opus 'The Musical Box' from *Nursery Cryme*, long since hailed as one of the group's finest works. Phil's contribution lifted the band into a new dimension. His dynamic, percussive playing was matched by a solid sense of time and relentless drive streets ahead of most other drummers of the day.

Phil had found the perfect home for his rapidly evolving technique and Genesis also gave him the opportunity to sing. He made his vocal debut on 'For Absent Friends'. But it was his flawless drumming that galvanised numbers like 'The Return Of The Giant Hogweed', where he neatly skipped between swing and marching beats. Such was his impact that Genesis founder Tony Banks, himself a virtuoso pianist, said: "Phil became far better than we ever thought he would be. He ended up being by far the best musician in the band. We didn't expect him to progress that fast!"

## THE GENESIS YEARS

With Genesis he displayed a restless energy, stage presence and increased involvement in writing, contributing to the dramatic 'Watcher Of The Skies' (*Foxtrot*, 1972) and suggesting using a lazy, relaxed beat that would transform 'Get 'Em Out By Friday'. The band's great masterpiece, 'Supper's Ready', was also enhanced by Phil's menacing 9/8 snare rhythms adding to the theatrical drama.

And his drumming just got better. The 1974 album

*The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* brought about a great split in Genesis when Peter Gabriel left in the aftermath of the double album and tour. It left the way clear for Phil to take over as lead singer on *The Trick Of The Tail* (1976), making his vocal presence felt on 'The Squonk'. His singing was like his drumming - passionate, accurate and right on the button.

*Wind And Wuthering* (1977) marked the point when American drummer Chester Thompson joined the band, replacing Bill Bruford who'd been brought in to help Phil out on their live dates. Phil had seen Chester play with Weather Report, and he made his debut with Phil at London's Rainbow Theatre on 1 January, 1977 staying onboard for the next 20 or more years. With Chester taking care of business, Phil could go upfront and sing all those complex Genesis songs.

It wasn't long before Phil and Chester were playing together on separate drum kits. The two men evolved complex, well-structured unison passages that introduced a new dimension to the business of drum solos with every beat appearing to be played with telepathic communication, and over the years their drum battles became ever more complex and exciting.

Genesis became a trio when guitarist Steve Hackett departed, leaving just Phil, Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford. Their 1978 album *And Then There Were Three* was a big seller and encouraged them to carry on their conquest of America. Despite heavy Genesis commitments, the tireless Phil Collins also found time to get his rocks off playing with an entirely different kettle of drums. His alternative outfit Brand X became one of the most commercially successful British jazz-rock groups of the '70s. It was Phil's response to Weather Report and it gave him a chance to stretch out and test his own mettle.

They released several best selling albums including *Unorthodox Behaviour* (1976) and *Moroccan Roll* (1977) that got into the UK Top 40 album charts. When they played at the Marquee Club in 1976, the management put up 'house full' signs, which pleased the lad who once swept the club floor. Phil explained his work ethic at the time: "I was quite prepared to leave Genesis and do something else, but it became apparent that I could do both. And that's what I really wanted, to have my cake and eat it. I can play Genesis songs, do Brand X and play on a lot of sessions."

## DRUM MACHINE MAMA

In the 1980s the music scene changed drastically and Genesis evolved a new style, coming up with the blockbuster albums *Duke* (1980) and *Abacab* (1981). Then the albums *Genesis* (1983) and the hit-packed *Invisible Touch* (1986) took the band into the MTV video age. By now Phil the singer had assumed such enormous proportions in the public's perception that many of his more naive fans weren't fully aware he played the drums, let alone appreciated that he was one of the best drummers in the world.

Phil's skill lay in utilising his powers of percussion as a vital tool in the process of record-making in the studio. He could then employ his firepower in the concert hall to hugely entertaining effect. He was still having his cake and eating it. But after blockbuster hits 'Mama', 'Invisible Touch' and 'Land Of Confusion' it began to be difficult to discern just where Phil's real drums were evident and when samples, synthesisers and drum machines took over.

In a parallel pop universe, Phil Collins had been busily establishing his career as a solo performer. It all began with 'In The Air Tonight', the smash hit single from debut album *Face Value* (1981). His loyal drum fans could not fail to be impressed by the cataclysmic Phil-style 'fill' that launched the ballad into abrupt overdrive and would become one of the most recognisable and mimicked drum fills in rock history.

Phil continued to play with Genesis, and by now he was a film star as well, following his role in hit movie *Buster*. Then in 1996 he quit the band after 25 years.

During the 1990s Phil was able to fulfil his dreams by forming his own Big Band (big influences on Phil were bop drummer Big Sid Catlett, Sonny Payne of the Count Basie Orchestra, Elvin Jones and Buddy Rich). Phil could now solo more like Dave Weckl when the mood took him, releasing tremendous spurts of energy, battering out rim shots and perfectly-executed rolls using his own tightly-formed matched grip.

In 2000 he contracted a viral infection that resulted in 'Sudden Deafness' syndrome. Though Phil reunited with Genesis for a major tour in 2007, the following year he announced his retirement from the music business. Then in September 2009 came the shocking news. Phil explained: "I can never play the drums again. It comes from years of playing. I can't even hold the sticks properly without it being painful. I cannot now play the drums or the piano." It seemed during the Genesis reunion tour he developed a problem with his left arm. He'd had surgery to correct a dislocated vertebrae in his neck that resulted in nerve damage to his hands. This meant that he couldn't grip sticks.

It was a devastating blow but Phil has not given up, and the drummer might eventually recover from the nerve damage. Don't be surprised if we see Phil Collins back behind a drum kit and hammering out 'In The Air Tonight' one more time. **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

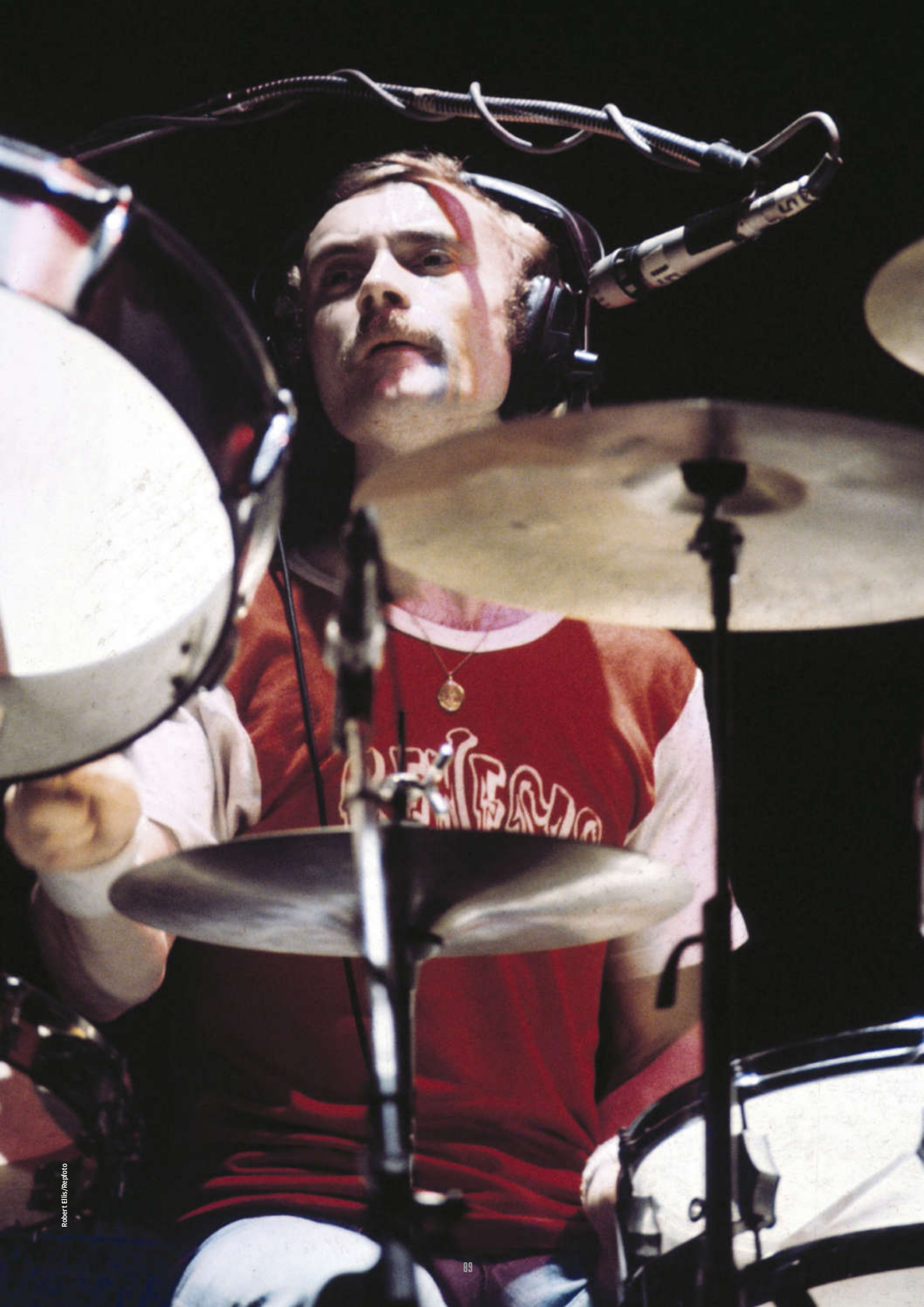
Genesis, Phil Collins, Brand X, Phil Collins Big Band

### CLASSIC CUTS: Genesis

*Trick Of The Tail* (1976),

Genesis *Genesis* (1983), Brand X *Moroccan Roll* (1977), Phil Collins *Face Value* (1981)





# Matt Cameron

Now the beating heart of two genre-defining, arena-filling bands, Matt Cameron is busy juggling sounds, styles and schedules with Pearl Jam and Soundgarden

WORDS: RICH CHAMBERLAIN

**A**fter enjoying successful yet separate careers with both Soundgarden and Pearl Jam, Matt Cameron now finds the pair entwined, with criss-crossing schedules and recording sessions. Yet he flips between arena tours, studio sessions and conflicting styles with ease. While Pearl Jam finds Cameron hard-hitting but methodical and ice cool, Soundgarden is an entirely separate animal, demanding a playing style every bit as exhausting mentally as it is physically, as he contends with time signature switches, delicate ghost notes and wave after wave of absolutely deafening noise.

In the mid-'80s Soundgarden rose out of Seattle's grey, rain-swept landscape and the drummer's future Pearl Jam bandmates Stone Gossard and Jeff Ahmet achieved scene success first with Green River and then Mother Love Bone. The latter group met a tragic end in 1990 when frontman Andy Wood died of a heroin overdose. The death brought Soundgarden and what would become Pearl Jam together.

"We all kept track of Mother Love Bone and everything that happened there after Andy passed away," Cameron tells us in hushed, reflective tones. "We were all really supportive. It was a very tight-knit local music scene. I think that always informed the personal relationships that we had with each other."

"After Mother Love Bone stopped Chris [Cornell, *Soundgarden* frontman] was going to do a Sub Pop single in honour of Andy Wood and once he told Stone and Jeff about that they decided to bring me into the fold and then the new singer they were working with."

The then-unknown singer that Pearl Jam trio Mike McCready, Gossard and Ahmet had been working with was Eddie Vedder and the fledgling frontman joined Soundgarden's Cameron and Cornell in the studio. The project became the much-lauded *Temple Of The Dog* record. With Vedder installed as Pearl Jam's frontman, both bands tore through the Seattle scene and into the mainstream as Cameron and co's third album, *Badmotorfinger*, and Pearl Jam's debut, *Ten*, soared into the charts on either side of the Atlantic.

*Superunknown* continued Soundgarden's upward trajectory, with Cameron's shifting time-signatures – you can find him in 7/4 on 'Spoonman', 5/4 on 'My Wave' and 15/8 on 'Limo Wreck', while even monster hit 'Black Hole Sun' strays into 9/8 – making the band not only one of the most successful bands of the raft of grunge acts pouring out of the US, but also one of the more musically diverse and complex.

"I listened to a lot of jazz music when I was a kid," says Cameron when asked about his playing style in the early days of Soundgarden. "A lot of Tony Williams, then I got into Bill Bruford, Terry Bozzio, Billy Cobham and some of the fusion guys. I think I was more influenced by jazz and fusion than punk or hard rock. But I loved all that stuff too – Deep Purple, Cheap Trick, MC5, Stooges, all that stuff. But I felt I was always learning more with jazz drummers or listening to drummers

that played more difficult music, I geeked out on that stuff." The geeking out paid off, as Cameron's thinking-man's approach to the kit added light and shade to Soundgarden's raw sound.

"I think what I brought to Soundgarden when I joined was an ability to go outside of punk rock and that feel they were in. Kim Thayil wrote, and still does write, riffs that aren't in 4/4 a lot of the time. He naturally writes that way. Chris is a very accomplished drummer in his own right and a lot of his songs were completely formed with drums, bass and guitar. A lot of times he would say, 'Hey, I've got this drum beat, is this the right thing to do?' I always encouraged him as far as coming up with drum patterns."

## GRUNGE TITANS RETURN

Despite their obvious musical chemistry and ability to sell albums by the truck-load, Cameron and his Soundgarden buddies called time on the band in 1997. But Cameron wasn't out of the limelight for long. After studio work with Smashing Pumpkins and an early incarnation of Queens Of The Stone Age, he returned to Seattle and answered Pearl Jam's SOS call.

"It really wasn't that crazy of a transition for me because I knew exactly what they were about as a band," he says. "There was a lot of common ground. If you're bringing someone in outside of your familiar zone, sometimes it can take a long time to make that transition because once a band becomes big and tours a lot it really becomes a family and you have to depend on each other and trust each other. Sometimes it's hard to bring in someone from outside of that group to be able to fit. It's more than just playing songs."

While everything instantly clicked personally, swapping the sprawling soundscapes of Soundgarden for a far more straight-up vibe with Pearl Jam was a jolt that perhaps left the sticksman over-compensating.

"I think the first year it was a little tricky for me just because I wasn't playing with as much dynamics that the music called for," he admits. "I was kind of just bashing my way through everything. I had to regroup after that first tour and just try to fit the dynamics of the band better. I think that was the only thing that I really had to concentrate on. That and just playing the music in the style of the guys that had recorded the songs. You don't want to it to feel completely different. Sometimes a new drummer can make everything feel different. But everyone in the band seemed to like what I was bringing to the table. It was, and still is, great."

"The only thing that takes adjustment is the volume, Soundgarden is a lot louder," he counters. "That's basically it! Once you gig a lot as a musician, you're expected to switch and you have to be able to do that. It's not that difficult for me. I've got to make sure my dynamics are correct in Pearl Jam – I can't just get up there and bash."

"I think my style has fed into Pearl Jam," he adds. "This music is vocal-based. It's really good as a

musician to try to just fit whatever gig you're doing and try to make it the best that it can be. For me, it was a challenge to really support the band and the vocal as opposed to trying to pop out as much as my parts do in Soundgarden. It's a different discipline but it's still challenging and it's an awesome challenge."

## LISTENING TO THE DRUMMER

Matt admits he feels lucky to have found not one but two bands that possess that rarest of commodities – a willingness to listen to the drummer's songs.

He enthuses: "It's great to be able to figure out what types of songs fit for each band. It took me a couple of years to figure out which types of songs would work for Pearl Jam that I brought to the table. They were always very open-minded about hearing the drummer's songs, which in a lot of bands is the last thing on the list to listen to. I was really happy with the way they embraced all of my songs. They don't always get used but it's just a different perspective in the way that they write. We've collaborated on songs as well. It's great to just have more writing partners. It's more opportunity to have your music fit into a specific group. Whereas with Soundgarden, I can bring in just a guitar riff and they'll have it written in two days."

"I tried to do more percussion and I tried to do some different elements in the drumming," he adds, evaluating his playing on Soundgarden's first (2012) album after their 13-year sabbatical. "I guess I was trying to go a little more African on a couple of things and bring the African influences into a hard rock band, which is kind of hard. It just happened naturally. It wasn't every song but on a couple of songs we really tried to make the grooves unlike a heavy rock band groove. But, those types of grooves are over super heavy-duty guitar riffs."

"We didn't really sit down and say, 'Okay, we need to do this and that for this record.' What's great about the band is that we just fully go for it and we really trust each other. If something isn't working I'll know it right away. They normally give me veto power if something isn't feeling right or if I can't get it. The music informs what sort of drumming I do and a lot of the time the music is kinda weird in Soundgarden, therefore the drumming must be a little weird." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Soundgarden, Pearl Jam,  
Mother Love Bone

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Temple Of  
The Dog *Temple Of The Dog*  
(1991), Soundgarden *Badmotorfinger* (1991),  
Soundgarden *Superunknown* (1994); Pearl  
Jam *Binaural* (2000)





# John 'Jabo' Starks & Clyde Stubblefield

Backing the Godfather of Soul, it's fair to say that James Brown's drummers Clyde and Jabo pretty much invented The Funk...

WORDS: JONATHAN WINGATE, LOUISE KING

**G**odfather of Funk James Brown once said, "I may include a lot of people in my music, but when I'm finished, it's all mine."

Whatever you think of him, you can't fault his honesty or his self confidence, but while the self-proclaimed 'hardest working man in show business' may have been the one in the spotlight, a huge amount of what he did on stage or in the studio was underpinned by the foundations laid down by Stubblefield and Starks' deceptively simple beats.

Theirs is the story of musicians who didn't earn a fortune backing the stars whose names were up in lights, yet between them, these two cool cats almost single-handedly invented the funk.

Like many true pioneers, they each talk of what they do as if it were the most natural, simple thing in the world, yet between them, Stubblefield and Starks have left an indelible mark on the musical landscape. In fact, it is safe to say that without them, hip-hop and rap as we know it probably wouldn't exist.

## Did you have a very musical upbringing?

**Clyde Stubblefield:** "Not really. I didn't take music lessons and never learned to read music. Rhythm came very naturally to me. I was eight when I went to an armed forces parade and the drums passed by. Boom, boom, boom - I felt them inside, and my chest was just pumping. I fell in love with the drums right then. I got hold of some garbage can lids and played that beat and started adding to it. Eventually I got a set of drums when I was about 12 or 13, which is when I started playing with a band."

**John 'Jabo' Starks:** "I fell in love with the drums before I even picked up my first sticks. When I was in my first two years in high school, I was at the Mardi Gras here in Mobile, I didn't know who the lead drummer of the marching band was, but I heard him coming. Once he got up to where we were standing, I must have walked two miles with him, just watching and listening. I knew right then that was what I wanted to do."

## Do you remember your first serious band?

**Clyde:** "I played with a group called The Cascades when I was maybe 15. We were on stage one night, and the singer and the sax player turned around to me and said: 'Hey man, can't you play some other beat?' I was thinking to myself, 'Well, I can just walk off or I can try something different.' So I tried something different. I don't know what I did, but they turned around afterwards and said, 'Yeah man, that's what we're talking about.' And I thought, 'Okay, cool.'"

**Jabo:** "My first taste of being a professional was with a local r'n'b group called The Castanets. I stayed with them for a couple of years, and Bobby Bland and Junior Parker wanted the whole band, and nobody wanted to leave except me, so I took off on the road with them. Eventually the two of them went their separate ways, but I stayed with Bobby."

## What sort of music inspired you back in the early days?

**Clyde:** "I just listened to all kinds of music - from Elvis Presley and The Beatles through to Wilson Pickett and country and western. I remember one drummer named Joe Merton who played with a band in Tennessee called The Pacesetters. When I was 12, he told me: 'Clyde, if you're gonna play drums, don't worry about reading music unless you're gonna be a studio drummer.' I didn't want to be a studio session drummer, I wanted to play in clubs, so I took his advice."

**Jabo:** "I listened to everything. They had a place called Club Harlem, I found a hole in the wall at the back, so I could watch and listen to every drummer. After I started playing there with The Castanets, a lot of guys wondered how I played shuffle my own way - from the top and the bottom. I developed that, but I got it from a drummer called Shep Shepherd, who was with Bill Doggett, and then I mixed it up and came up with my own stuff."

## How did you meet James Brown?

**Clyde:** "James heard me playing in a club in Georgia in the mid-'60s and he asked me to audition. I didn't really know who he was, although I'd heard 'Papa's Got A Brand New Bag' and 'I Feel Good'. I was a little bit excited when he asked me to audition, but I just kept myself cool. So I met him and he asked me to join him, and I said yeah."

**Jabo:** "He sent some people to ask me to play with him after he'd seen me playing in some club with Bobby Bland. I didn't want to leave Bobby, but then I got married and had my first baby, and I became real business-like then. That's about the time I got ready to leave Bobby Bland and join James Brown."

## Do you remember the first time you played with him?

**Clyde:** "Oh yeah, I remember that. He asked me to audition for him, and I went down to Augusta, Georgia and he was performing that night, and he took me out on stage for one song. I didn't know the numbers, and I'd only just met him a couple of weeks before that. It scared the hell out of me. I got a call a week later telling

me to be in North Carolina to join the show. The next night I was sitting on stage on the drums."

**Jabo:** "They asked me to come down, I had my drums, and there were five drummers on stage. I joke you not. I watched the group for three or four nights, and one night they said: 'We're gonna set you up on the end here,' and I got up and played a couple of things. Melvin Parker was there for a short time, then he got Clyde, and it was three drummers. And all of a sudden, it became two - Clyde and myself. He'd hire guys, and they'd sit on stage for a week or two and they never played a thing. I never knew what was going on, man. So my audition was a gig."

## Would you say that he was quite an intimidating figure?

**Clyde:** "Sure, I'd say he was a very intimidating figure. He's an emotional guy with a bad temper when he's performing, and if you're not playing right he gives you hell. If you weren't playing right, you'd get fined for it, although you didn't know what you were doing wrong. He'd turn around on stage and open his hand - like five, 10, 15, or 20 dollars. Next thing I knew I got my pay cheque and they just said: 'Mr Brown took out the fines on you.' I was tired of that in the end, and that's one of the reasons I wanted to get out after six years. I was probably making \$350 a week, and out of that, I had to pay for hotels, food and dry cleaning, and then I had to send money home to my family. Back then, we were probably out on the road or working about 300 days of the year. To be honest, we parted on bad terms. I haven't spoken to him since the day I left in 1971."

**Jabo:** "I watched him fine guys up to \$100 a night, man. After I'd got with the band, he said: 'If you don't think you can handle it, I'll pay you for the time you've been here, and you can go.' I said, 'I left a gig to come to this gig, but I will not pay a fine, so you tell me what you want me to do, and I'm gonna do that.' I never paid a fine."

## Did you find James Brown easy or frustrating to work with?

**Clyde:** "He was easy to work with, but also frustrating. Sometimes we wanted things to be simple, and he would over-complicate things and do something to cut the groove a little, but we couldn't really say anything because he was the boss, he created it."

**Jabo:** "Let's face it, James is no singer, but you won't find a finer showman. The band got very little respect, but what we were doing as a band was what made James Brown who he was. That was frustrating."





*Did you find it frustrating not being credited on the records?*

**Clyde:** "I did. Well, no, I don't think I did at the time, because people knew it was like that – the James Brown Show. Nobody knew who we were, but from what I understand it was the British who started putting the names of the musicians on the album covers so they could find out who was playing what."

*How much improvisation was going on in the studio and on stage?*

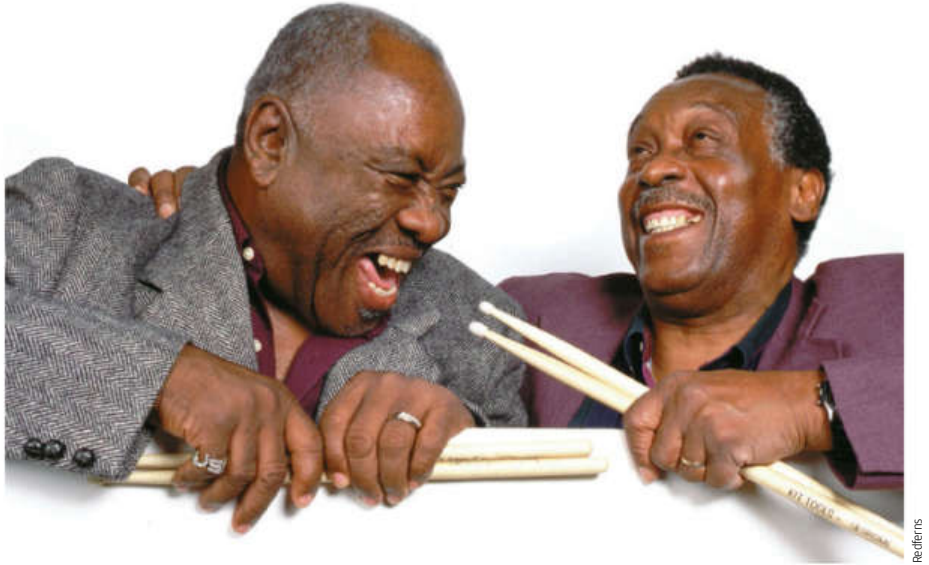
**Clyde:** "Quite a bit everywhere we played, because that's where our grooves came from. There was no safety net, so it was always right there on the edge of everything that was happening, and it had to groove, it had to function. It was just funky, because everybody was excited about doing it. You can feel that excitement on those records. It was mainly the structure of the songs on stage, but for the records, I was more free because you'd created the rhythms, so you're putting something new in it, and you don't know exactly what until you've done it."

**Jabo:** "If he heard you doing something, he'd say: 'No, play it this way.' Then you'd look at him and play it like you were playing already. And he'd go: 'Yeah, that's it – you got it.' But you had to let him think that it was his idea. I would say that James thought he could play drums."

*Would you say that feel is just as important as technique?*

**Clyde:** "Definitely. All of it is one thing – technique, feel and vibe. The technique is that you're playing drums, but those drums have more sounds than just a snare sound or whatever. I use all that technique to create a rhythm pattern, and I use all the sounds on them – I don't just play a shuffle backbeat without adding a little touch from myself and doing something else with it. I'm an instinctive drummer. That's my sound, that's my soul. I play all natural. It's just a feeling. I'm playing the rhythms, but I'm just changing the intonation."

**Jabo:** "Well, I think there are drummers who like to be seen – look at me, I'm all over the drums – but you're distracting from what the people in front of you are doing. Vibe is just as important as technique. If you go all wild and start showing me how fast your hands are, where's the groove?"



*Would you say less is generally more as far as drumming is concerned?*

**Clyde:** "Right, as far as any instrument is concerned. I found myself doing a little too much, letting my grooves handle themselves, and I was going outside of them and playing a little too much technical stuff. A few years ago, I started cutting off stuff and just getting a groove there. I just want to groove people. I don't want to show off or show them what I can do, because I don't know what I can do."

**Jabo:** "I say this – you cannot beat simplicity. I don't care how fancy you are, but the only advice I'd give to a drummer is to keep it in the pocket – keep it simple until it's time for you to do something else. If you're the drummer and you're not out front, don't be out front. Keep it in the pocket with the rhythm. You've got to remember what you're there to do."

*What do you think it is that makes your playing so unique?*

**Clyde:** "I just sat down and created my own patterns out of my own soul. I don't even think about whether I'm unique, I just think about whether I like the groove on it. My rhythms are different to other drummers because I think different patterns. I love sounds and I listen to what I'm doing."

**Jabo:** "I don't know, I just play Jabo – that's all I know

how to do. I try to be able to play a little bit of everything the way that I play it, but I don't try to play like nobody else, and I can't copy anybody else. If people say to me: 'Oh, you sound just like Clyde,' I say to them, 'No, Clyde sounds like Clyde and Jabo sounds like Jabo.' After all these years, why should I try to play like anybody other than myself?"

*Do you feel frustrated that you never got paid for the countless samples of your work that have gone into hip-hop tunes etc?*

**Clyde:** "I feel very frustrated, but I can't do anything about it, so I don't let it raise my blood pressure. I would say that my rhythms helped to form hip-hop, and I haven't got any credit from anyone giving me a cheque, and I haven't received any recognition from no hip-hoppers either. They always say that it's me in those drum machines. I'm still playing four or five nights a week. I need to earn a living. Hip-hoppers may sample me, but they don't ask me to play on their records. I don't know why that is, but that's their problem."

*Do you still enjoy playing as much as ever?*

**Clyde:** "Oh God yes. I love it more and more, and I never stop learning. I learn every time I play something new. I never play on autopilot, although having said that, that's the way I did the 'Funky Drummer' beat – on autopilot. I find that record quite boring."

**Jabo:** "Yes, sir. In fact, the more I play, the more I love it. The minute that my love for music isn't there, it's time to stop. I can't see that happening – not as long as the good Lord keeps my mind, my hands and my feet working. I'm having more fun than the people who come and see me play could ever have... yeah boy!" **R**



**ESSENTIALS**



**RELATED ARTISTS:**

James Brown

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Clyde:

James Brown 'Cold Sweat'

(1972), 'Funky Drummer'

(1970), 'Say It Loud I'm Black And I'm Proud'

(1968); Jabo: James Brown 'The Payback'

(1974), 'Super Bad', (1970), 'Sex Machine' (1970)



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# Stephen Morris

Stephen Morris pioneered the mixing of electronic and acoustic drumming and helped create the Manchester sound that dominated British music in the '80s and '90s

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**W**hen the young Stephen Morris first told his father he wanted to play the drums, his reaction was: "Oh no, please, not the drums! I've never met a sane drummer yet!" Stephen had been learning to play the clarinet with his jazz-loving dad's full support, but the young musician wanted to join a band and the only opening was on the drums.

Stephen's earliest drumming heroes were John French, from Captain Beefheart's Magic Band, and Jaki Liebezit from '70s avant-garde rockers Can, an early indication of his leftfield musical proclivities. He joined the hugely influential Joy Division and, following the death of vocalist Ian Curtis, Stephen, Peter Hook and Bernard Sumner formed New Order with keyboard player Gillian Gilbert. Where Joy Division had displayed a sombre post-punk sensibility, New Order ventured into dance music, blending electronic disco beats with hooks, unmistakable bass lines and Sumner's melancholy vocals. The formula reached critical mass in 1983 with the release of 'Blue Monday' on Tony Wilson's label, Factory records, which went on to become the best-selling British 12" single of all time.

New Order were co-owners of the Hacienda Club, widely regarded as the site where the boundaries between dance and rock music were dissolved in an ecstatic haze. Throughout the '80s, the band stayed in the limelight with the release of *Brotherhood* (1986) and *Technique* (1989). When the '90s arrived, the hacienda and Factory records floundered, and after *Republic* was released in 1993, the band members went their separate ways. Stephen and Gillian married and released an album as The Other Two, referencing the tendency of the music press to refer to them as "the other two members of New Order". In addition to their album, *The Other Two And You*, they scored the theme for *America's Most Wanted*.

New Order reformed in 1998 to record a song for the *The Beach*, and followed this with the album *Get Ready* in 2001. Having spent much of 2012 touring with a line-up that's missing Peter Hook but sees Gillian back on keys, new recorded material is said to be in the works. However, *Rhythm's* interview with Stephen was conducted in 2005 as the band prepared to release their last studio album, *Waiting For The Siren's Call*.

## When did you start experimenting with electronic drums?

"On the cover of Can's *Tago Mago* there are these things by Jaki's drum kit, which are actually amplifiers, but I thought they were drum synthesisers. I didn't know what a drum synthesiser was, but I thought it must be really cool because it must make you sound like Jaki. When an affordable drum synthesiser came on the market, the Star Instruments Synare 3, I spent all my money on one. Initially I was disappointed that it didn't make you sound like Jaki, and just made disco noises. I did what I thought I could do with it. I think the

first thing we used it on in Joy Division was 'Disorder'. I managed to get an air raid siren noise out of it."

## If Joy Division had continued, would the electronics still have been so important?

"I think they probably would, but not as much, because they were part of the circumstances that we found ourselves in. The end of Joy Division was a tragic one but there was never any question of us giving up and going back to the day job. But we didn't want to carry on as Joy Division Lite. We were trying to restart, re-learn how to write songs without Ian, and just ended up going down that road. In Joy Division the thing that I did most was rolling tom-tom things and I started off doing that in New Order, then made a conscious effort not to do that and tried to be more disco, more four on the floor and everything followed from there. The first thing we did was 'Everything's Gone Green', which was like an electronic synth pulse and me playing over the top of it. The next one we did, 'Temptation', was a bit further along from that, then we did '586'. They were all little steps along the way that ended up at 'Blue Monday', which of course has no drums on it at all."

## Were there times when you thought, "They won't need me anymore, they'll kick me out?"

"There were plenty. I was quite comfortable with the old DMX drum machine, and we had a Dr Rhythm, then a Band In The Box, but I was comfortable with those because I knew how unreliable they were, and I was the only person who knew how to program them, so the job was safe. It was when the first samplers came out that I worried. To me it just seemed like wholesale theft, they could just nick a bit of what you'd done and use it. I embraced drum machines because they could do repetitive things and I could play over the top."

## What did you play on the new album?

"I went to my daughter's school concert and they were doing a percussion piece. They were using old single-headed concert toms and I thought they sounded fantastic. That's what I used to use all the time and I realised what was left of my old Joy Division kit was rotting somewhere, so I decided to set out on a drum restoration project. I put my old Rogers kit back together and managed to run down some old Synare 3s and remade my Joy Division kit even down to using Evans Hydraulic heads. About 50 percent of the drums on this album were done using that set-up. I'd be using the old Rogers toms and the producer would come in and say, 'That sounds good. Blimey, it's not got a head on the bottom. I've not seen one of those for years!'"

## What snare did you use?

"I collect snares. In the early days you'd record things as dead as possible, you'd try to get as much separation and go for a really dry sound and then put reverb on afterwards. Now what I do is just stick the drums in a

room and go into the sound of the drum and the way it reacts with the room. It's horses for courses. I usually use Black Beauties. I have three of those.

"My favourite one at the moment I got with a little Yamaha Hipgig kit, which is great apart from being banana yellow. It's a really tiny little snare, almost a piccolo but it's deep. I've got this snare orchestra and you know what each one's good for. The thing that I'm after is an old Leedy. When I was restoring a Rogers kit I got into the history of American drums. I'm scouring the internet for a pre-Pearl Harbor 1930s Leedy snare.

"In Joy Division I had this fantastic 18" ride cymbal. It was an old '20s cymbal and it sounded fantastic. I couldn't tell you who made it, it had worn off it was that old, but it was brilliant and it got stolen. I've only just got a ride cymbal that I like. That's why all through New Order there isn't a ride cymbal. It wasn't that I didn't want to play one, I just couldn't find one that I liked."

## What about live?

When we got back together in '98, Bernard raised the issue of tinnitus and didn't want it to be loud onstage. I said, 'We'll get a Roland TD-10 V-Drum kit.' It was okay but I couldn't do without a real kick and snare. It didn't feel right and when we were playing there was no sound coming from the drummer, the drums were coming out of your monitors. Anyway, the kick and snare ended up not getting replaced, because it's still got a trigger on, but I used a mixture - a live kit and a Roland V-Drum kick and snare. I just moved on to a Roland TD-20, which is fantastic."

## Is it gratifying that New Order has inspired so many new bands?

"I get a bit embarrassed to be honest. It's a nice feeling that all these people are saying that we influenced them and we're the reason they're playing music, because we said the same things about The Velvet Underground and Kraftwerk and Bowie. I don't think that bands like The Killers sound like us, but it's great that they acknowledge our influence in getting them going. When we were doing *Waiting For The Siren's Call*, one of the producers said, "Just play like you, you're really fashionable. I thought, 'Thirty years to become fashionable. There's something wrong somewhere.'" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Joy Division, New Order, The Other Two

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Joy Division *Unknown Pleasures*

(1979), Joy Division *Substance* (1988), New Order *Low-Life* (1985), New Order *Technique* (1989), New Order *Substance* (1987)





# Terry Bozzio

One of Frank Zappa's many legendary drummers and the first to master Zappa's nigh-impenetrable track 'The Black Page', Bozzio has also worked with Jeff Beck, Fantômas and more

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**T**erry Bozzio has spent his career playing some of the most technically complex music ever coaxed out of a drumset. For someone who has reached such vertiginous heights in his field, Bozzio had the simplest of beginnings. He was first inspired by the sight of Little Ricky on the *I Love Lucy* show and Cubby O'Brien on *The Mickey Mouse Club* then, when Ringo Starr appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the die was cast. The inevitable pleading for a drum kit followed, but he had to be patient...

"I started with a pair of 5B sticks, a practice pad and three books - Haskell Harr's *Drum Rudiments*, *Stick Control* by George L. Stone and *Syncopation* by Ted Reed," remembers Terry. "I played for six months before I got a snare drum and a hi-hat only."

After taking music classes in high school, Terry went on to study at the College of Marin where he was turned on to jazz. He impressed his teachers enough to earn a scholarship to study with two members of the San Francisco Symphony. He landed his first job playing drums in the musical *Godspell* before establishing himself on the San Francisco jazz club circuit. "I had a rich musical life then," he recalls. "Almost every day I was playing something entirely different. There was a very hip big band I played with every Monday night at the Great American Music Hall. Another day I'd be playing Latin jazz. It was a great time for me and it wasn't easy to leave that and move to LA, but I got the audition with Zappa." After three years with Frank, Terry broke out on his own and, 30 years later, he's still pushing the limits of himself and his instrument.

## How did you land the gig with Frank Zappa?

"I didn't know anything about the guy. He wasn't in my set of influences at all. I bought *Roxy And Elsewhere* and *Apostrophe*, and literally did not sleep for two days, he scared me so much - not only the level of musicianship but the incredible complexity of the music and sheer volume of memorisation involved. I thought to myself, 'What could I possibly offer this guy?' I found it almost impossible to practise, I felt weak and faint."

"I flew down and walked into his rehearsal studio, which was a big warehouse. He had a stage and sound and lighting equipment like I'd never seen. There was the most difficult music I had ever seen spread out all over the stage. It was way more difficult than Bartók and the pieces I had tried to play in college. There were two Octopus drum sets, George Duke, Tom Fowler and Frank Zappa up there [on stage], and while one drummer would arrange a kit for himself, the other drummer would be auditioning. They were going back and forth and dropping like flies. As I watched a couple more people fail, I noticed that a lot of them were trying to flaunt their chops or impress Frank with their technique. I thought, 'At least I can go up, try to read, try to listen and play with the guy,' which is something I learned from jazz. He asked me to read this chart called 'Approximate', which is a very difficult piece with

all kinds of superimposed rhythms, odd-time meters, and the notes are written up and down the stave in Xs. Everyone is to play the rhythms precisely but they are to approximate the pitches according to the melodic curve of the Xs, and the whole thing comes out like a Thelonius Monk cacophony in rhythmic unison. When I came to a 13-tuplet I stopped and said, 'Okay, that's this,' and I showed him I understood it even though I couldn't sight-read it and couldn't quite play it perfectly. We tried it up to tempo and I fluffed my way through it. Then he said, 'I'm going to test your memorisation,' and he spewed out some structure that was a series of fives and some other odd times. We jammed in 19 then he said, 'Okay, I want to hear you play a blues shuffle,' just to check out my feel. I did that and he said, 'I really like the way you play, I want to hear you again after I hear the rest of these guys.' His road manager turned to the remaining 25 guys, they started shaking their heads. The road manager said, 'That's it, nobody else wants to audition.' Frank said, 'It looks like you've got the gig if you want it.' I said, 'Are you sure I can do this?' He said, 'If you're willing to work, you can do it.' I was completely overwhelmed and started a musical education beyond my wildest dreams - the equivalent of Marine boot camp for a musician."

## What did you think when you first encountered 'The Black Page', one of Frank's most notoriously difficult pieces?

"That was left in the dust by the time I left the band. There was 'Mo' N Herb's Vacation', lots of stuff that was equally as difficult as the most difficult part of 'The Black Page' but 10 pages long. I was lucky. He walked in, handed me 'The Black Page' and said, 'What do you think of this, Bozzio?' I said, 'Wow, I'm impressed.' I could sight-read the simpler parts of it. I said, 'Let me chip away at this,' and in a week or so of fooling around with it every day I was able to play it for him. Then he wrote a melody and we started playing it as a band. Because I was the first, he felt I played it very well and it was a big notch in my gun. I take credit for what I've done as a musician, as a composer, all the work that I've put in, but on the other hand nobody would know who the hell I am if it wasn't for Frank Zappa. I'm a very lucky man."

## When you performed with Zappa Plays Zappa, were the songs burnt into long-term memory or did you have to revise?

"The less important ones weren't and I had to re-listen to them. I had avoided the pain of playing or thinking about 'The Black Page' for at least 20 years. When I went on the road with Chad Wackerman, around 2000, we did a duets tour and I felt, well, now should be the time I re-learn this thing and we should play it together because we both did it with Frank. I committed it to memory and I've been playing it ever since. 'The Black Page #2' I had a chart for. That's a lot easier but I had

totally forgotten how that went. The only problem I had with it was that the way I was set up in that ensemble was to be a special guest. It was Napoleon [Brock] with the band covering two hours, and then Bozzio comes out and sings this punk, fast rock'n'roll crap that's incredibly physically challenging. It's all this fast shit for 20 minutes and you're completely wiped out, then - drenched with sweat and light-headed from lack of oxygen - you've got to bring it in and play 'The Black Page' perfectly. That part was rough."

## How did you set about having a solo career?

"I started to write songs and wanted to step out from the drums and be a lead singer like Phil Collins. I got quite good deals, which by today's standards are ridiculous - \$5,000 to \$10,000 advances to go in the studio and do one tune - but at the end of the day they didn't bite. That just left me in this place where I felt frustrated by the whole pop music thing. As a therapy, I started to practise and I questioned why I was practising. I was already known as this drummer who could do weird stuff with Frank Zappa, and jazz or fusion - [I thought] 'If I get any better it could alienate me more from anyone in the music business as it is right now,' - yet I felt better, personally, having worked on something I didn't know how to do every day for an hour, almost like a meditation. I got tapped on the shoulder and asked if I wanted to do some drum clinics. So that was scary the first time but, as I was doing it with Sonny Emory, a great drummer, we started to have a lot of fun. I went out on my second tour by myself and had to play a little more because I didn't have another guy picking up the slack. I had developed these ostinato patterns while I was practising. I thought, 'Maybe I have the guts to play them for some other drummers.' I threw out a couple of these ostinato things and people just loved it, so I thought, 'Okay, I'm going to explore this area of accompanying myself and playing more soloistically,' and just got into it. It was very rewarding on a personal level. I've found myself, the last 20 years, under the guise of a drum and cymbal commercial, having this artistic freedom to do whatever the hell I want to do at drum clinics and solo performances. It was an amazing transition for me and now I wouldn't have it any other way." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Frank Zappa, Jeff Beck, UK, Missing Persons, Fantômas, Korn

### CLASSIC CUTS: Frank

Zappa *Zoot Allures* (1976), Frank Zappa *Sheik Yerbouti* (1979), Jeff Beck *Jeff Beck's Guitar Shop* (1989)





Rob Stannan

# Clem Burke

Innovatively fusing punk with disco, and making it all seem effortlessly cool, Clem helped fire New York new wave legends Blondie to chart success in the late '70s

WORDS: JON COHAN

**T**he Blondie legend's incredible grooves fused punk rock and disco on such hits as 'Heart Of Glass', 'Atomic', 'Picture this' and 'Rapture' ensuring huge success for the stylish CBGB's scenesters. He has also had stints drumming for Bob Dylan, Eurythmics, The Ramones and Iggy Pop. His Clem Burke Drumming Project, which analyses the physical and psychological effects of drumming, recently earned him an honorary doctorate from the University of Gloucestershire.

## What made you choose the drums?

"Well, my dad was a society drummer and there were drums around the house. I think the first record that hit me was probably 'Wipeout' by the Surfaris and then The Beatles. I'm left-handed, even though I play right-handed, and had trouble picking up the guitar when I was a kid, I moved over to drums.

"I lead with my left but lately I've been practising leading with my right. When I do 16th notes on the hi-hat, I come down on the snare with my left hand instead of my right. It's actually closer to the snare, but I think it's helped me with something like 'Rapture', but now I purposely try to lead with the right. I think some of the quirks in my playing might have given me some of my style, oddly enough."

## How did you end up in the New York scene?

"I was a big New York Dolls fan and a big fan of David Bowie, Roxy Music, Cockney Rebel, The Sweet, T-Rex. Basically, the friends I knew who were into Zappa and Beefheart didn't like that stuff at all. So I found people along the way who were into it, and one of those people was Gary Valentine, the original bass player in Blondie, the guy who wrote 'X-Offender', the song that got us our deal.

"We used to go to a place called the Club 82 on East 4th Street and 2nd Avenue. It was a transvestite/lesbian bar that one night a week would have rock bands like the Dolls, or Wayne County And The Electric Chairs, The Neon Boys - which was the band Tom Verlaine had before Television. I had a band called Sweet Revenge and we played at the Club 82 a couple of times - that was our goal, to play there.

"Along the way, Debbie Harry and Chris Stein had a band called The Stilettoes which would open for the New York Dolls at the Club 82. That glam rock scene kind of died down and coincidentally, right around the corner from there was CBGB's, so everyone cut their hair and started wearing leather jackets and moved around the corner and started hanging out at CBGB's. My quote is that there were no 'punks' at CBGB's - it was more like bohemian, outcast type people. It was like a clubhouse for beatniks with about 100 people. I was like 18 years old, just a kid on the streets of New York and by that time we got a storefront on the Lower East Side where we would crash. I knew Debbie and Chris were looking for a drummer so I went to an audition, and we had a

lot of common interests in music and the arts, people like Burroughs and the MC5 and Velvet Underground, but also The Ronettes and bubblegum rock.

"The first gig was two nights we had booked at CBGB's and the first night [bass player] Fred Smith announced he was leaving to join Television. I brought my friend Gary Valentine into the band and then we had the nucleus of what came to be Blondie. That was in early 1975."

## Was there an awareness at that point you were all part of something special?

"No. The awareness was that Debbie had a special charisma that I was taken by. My whole thing was that I wanted to find my Marc Bolan, or my David Bowie or Mick Jagger. I wanted to find somebody with that much potential. They had some interesting songs and they were doing original music, and I wanted to play original music. I wasn't very much interested in being in a club band. My whole goal was to be on a record that was in the cut-out bin in Woolworth's. That's where I used to buy my records and that's where I thought hip, good records ended up, in the cut-out bin."

## It's pretty amazing how that scene had such an impact on music and was so influential for the next 25 years.

"I guess you could say it was our version of the Cavern Club. The thing about CB's was that we were allowed to develop in public. We weren't particularly good when we first started, but we were writing and performing and we were able to do it in front of people, which I think might be a better way to learn how to do it. I'm not really big on people staying in their house and practising all the time and never feeling as though they're really good enough to play out. I think it's really counter-productive if you want to be a professional musician. There's a lot more to it than how proficient you are as a musician - it has a lot to do with presentation, not being nervous in front of audiences and all that. I think people get more worried about being junior Dave Weckles, instead of really getting out there and just doing it."

## You were more of an accomplished drummer than many of the others who came out of that New York scene.

"I have a couple of theories about that. A lot of it had to do with the fact that no one could really play, including myself. I got this reputation early on for being a good drummer and that's because a lot of people who were around sucked and couldn't play at all. I had some experience by then and had played in high school, and a lot of people had never played an instrument. In Blondie, although Chris is a really innovative guitarist, he wasn't really that solid so I think I developed into a better player because I had a lot of holes to fill.

"Working with producers like Richard Gottehrer and Mike Chapman was important for helping us focus on making good songs and it definitely helped my drumming. I learned how to play for the song and to be more minimal in my own playing, but also how to give it that extra boost. I was influenced by Hal Blaine and Earl Palmer, and music they did with Phil Spector."

## Was there ever a Blondie song you just knew was going to be a hit?

"'Heart of Glass' was buried in *Parallel Lines* - we never thought of it as a single. We thought it was too weird with the sequencing and the drum machine at the beginning and that became our first Number One single in the US. We never really knew what was going to be a hit. A big controversy in Blondie is how 'Heart Of Glass' evolved into what it became. Mike Chapman takes credit for it, but the song was kicking around for a long time. It was our first demo, but not in that vein. The way I remember it was that *Saturday Night Fever* was a record I really, really liked, and one day we were kicking around 'Heart Of Glass' and I figured I'd just do this JR Robinson thing. I just wanted to do this Bee Gees 'Night Fever' type groove.

"That take of 'Dreaming' was just me kind of blowing through the song. It's not like I expected that to be the take. I was consciously overplaying for the sake of it because it was a run-through. I always say 'Dreaming' would have been a bigger hit had I not played like that. It was Top 40, but it was never a huge hit. 'Atomic' was another one-off *Eat To The Beat*, that was just kind of a joke and it ended up going to Number One in the UK. We just kind of blew it out real quick.

"When we did 'Call Me' with Giorgio Moroder, it was the first time I ever played to a sequenced, pre-existing track, which was still a new thing back then. We did the song in one afternoon and didn't think about it until we heard it on the radio months later and it sounded faintly familiar and we realised it was us."

## 'Rapture' (1980) was such an important song in the history of hip-hop...

"We worked with the Wu Tang Clan and they said the first rap song they ever heard was 'Rapture'. It would have been funny to be walking around New York in the '80s near public housing and see these little kids outside singing the rap from the song." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Blondie, Iggy Pop, Pete Townshend

**CLASSIC CUTS:**

Blondie *Parallel Lines* (1978),

Blondie *Eat To The Beat* (1979)





# Ed Thigpen

One of the last great swing drummers, Ed Thigpen spent over 60 years spreading the gospel of jazz around the globe

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**E**d Thigpen was born in Chicago in December 1930, the son of drummer Ben Thigpen. After learning his trade in high school in LA, Ed's first big break was the invitation to join Cootie Williams' swing band at the Savoy Ballroom in New York in 1951. Ed's graceful brushwork and his warm sense of swing made him an invaluable sideman. By his own count, he recorded more than 1,000 albums over his six decades in the music business, including more than 50 during his tenure with the brilliant Oscar Peterson Trio. He nurtured a tireless dedication to acoustic jazz while working with some of the biggest stars in the swing pantheon. He toured with Dinah Washington and Ella Fitzgerald and worked with a host of top pianists.

A keen educator, Ed published five books, including *Talking Drums* and *The Sound Of Brushes*, alongside *The Essence Of Brushes* DVD. He was still gigging and sharing his love of jazz until he sadly passed away in 2010. *Rhythm* met the great man in 2009.

## Did you learn to play drums from your father?

"No, I was raised in a boarding home in California. Teachers in grade school knew my dad was a drummer and kids in the neighbourhood would say, 'Why don't you play the drums?' One thing led to another and I started in grade school bands, then junior high school. In high school I wound up in a swing band. Dexter [Gordon] went through there, Chico Hamilton, some great players. From there I went to junior college and got a call for a job. That ended my college career and I was on the scene. After that I went to St. Louis to live with my dad, then on the road with Candy Johnson."

## How did you hook up with Dinah Washington?

"I was at the Savoy with Cootie Williams and in those days we travelled all over the country. It would be two or three acts and Dinah was one of the acts that went out with Cootie Williams' seven-piece band. Dinah had Wynton Kelly, Keter Betts and Jimmy Cobb in her trio. I had never seen such players – it was beautiful. I went into the army and was sent to Korea. I was discharged in Chicago. Before I left I was on the road with Cootie and Dinah and that same package was in a theatre in Chicago. Keter Betts told me Dinah needed a drummer. You're supposed to get your old job when you come out of the army but the drummer with Cootie was fantastic. I don't remember his name but I know he played liked crazy and the road manager said, 'I don't know if you'll get that job back.' Dinah was going to St Louis where my parents lived the following week. I got out of the service and went down and played with her. She said 'We're going to Kansas next week, you want to come?'"

## You also played with Bud Powell in the '50s.

### Were you aware of how influential he was?

"Everybody knew who Bud was. He was a major influence on all the piano players, along with Art Tatum before him. I've been very fortunate, I've been blessed.

Not only Bud Powell, Dinah, Johnny Hodges; staying in New York, Jutta Hipp came over from Germany and I played in the Hickory House for a long time. That was a major club and I started making a lot of recordings during that period. In 1956 I was with Billy Taylor and doing a lot of work in New York."

## As the music changed, did that affect your role?

"A little bit. We were swing drummers first of all. You had to have a good beat and keep the time primarily. Then when Max and Art and Kenny Clarke came on the scene, they were very hip and we followed those guys. You followed where the thing was leading you. I tried to adapt to the independent coordination stuff because drummers were stretching out a little bit more but I was mainly a swing drummer. I gradually gravitated because the music required it. You add different things to your playing stylistically, but the roots were always the same. You adapt. There is a basic thing guys want and those elements came out of the swing era. Even Dizzy came out of the swing era. The function of the drummer was to have good time, meaning swing time. You had to build up a repertoire of songs and guys would interpret the songs. That is where your improvisation and your insight into the music came in, being able to accompany someone's playing."

## When you recorded *Night Train*, did you have any premonition it would be so popular?

"That came in 1961. You're never aware of what is going to be a hit. Norman [Granz] was Oscar's manager and they had done this whole series of records, the Songbook Series. They did the first series with the trio with Herb. Norman decided, since it looked like I was going to be there on a permanent basis, it would be a good idea to do the series over again with drums, bass and piano. It became very, very successful. We might do one album in a day. We played every night and a lot of those Songbook albums came out one or two a day sometimes. When you went into a club, you didn't go in for just a night. You went in for a week or two. They had clubs all over the country in those days."

## How did you join Ella Fitzgerald's group?

"We had been on tour with Ella. Norman put together the Jazz At The Philharmonic tours, those were very important. We toured sometimes with Ella, sometimes with Basie, the All-Stars, Roy Eldridge, Benny Carter, people like that. We came over to Europe. We worked nine, 10 months a year. Oscar would be a featured artist with the trio, then Ray and I would be part of the rhythm section and they'd have another pianist. Sometimes Miles Davis's group played with us."

## How did you approach working with a vocalist like Ella?

"Her voice was her instrument. Whether it's Dinah or Ella or Sarah [Vaughan] or Peggy Lee, whoever you

work with, if they are the headliner you try to support them. They like what you do, otherwise they wouldn't have called you so you try to support the lead artist, how they breathe and sing. I think of them as musicians first whose voice happens to be their instrument."

## When you moved to Copenhagen (Ed married a Danish girl in 1971 and relocated there), was there much of a jazz scene there?

"At that time Copenhagen was a good place. We had quite a jazz community and everyone came through here. In those days festivals were prevalent but to begin with when I came here, Kenny Drew was here and Horace Parlan came, Idrees Sulieman, Dexter Gordon, then later Thad Jones, Ernie Wilkins and Richard Boone, so quite a few guys were living here. Then you had guys living in Paris and Holland. Acoustic jazz was prevalent so it was a good environment."

## How important is it to you to pass on what you know through your books?

"It's the same way things were passed on to me. You write down excerpts or you come up with ideas because people ask you, 'How do you do this?' Gradually things accumulate in your head and on paper. You get recognised for something and people ask you about it so you try to pass that knowledge on the way things were passed on to you."

## How has the music changed since you started?

"I just wish we had more acoustic music. That's what I've grown up with. Not that you can't change it because it's all music and entertainment. If you see a good show, it's like a painting. If you enjoy it, it does something to you. It has its own history and it's always evolving. Some of the things that some of us feel are essential to the music are the swing and that it should feel good. Blues is an essential element but you have European classical things that have made a great contribution to the music. We draw from all types of music. It's evolving all the time. Nowadays African and Latin rhythms are very prevalent. The music is the most important thing. It's been a unifying, gratifying and evolutionary force in the cycle of life throughout history. That's what we still do. We entertain people. It keeps going around." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Oscar Peterson Trio, Dinah Washington, Ella Fitzgerald  
**CLASSIC CUTS:** Oscar Peterson Trio *Night Train*

(1962), Dinah Washington, *After Hours With Miss D* (1953)







# Ronnie Vannucci

Ronnie Vannucci is the man powering The Killers' glamorous indie rock'n'roll with his inventive, musical style

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**W**ith a background in classical percussion, Ronnie Vannucci approaches his instrument with the attention to detail of a master craftsman. Where many drummers are content to show up, play and leave the fine details of recording to producers and engineers, Ronnie prefers to get right into the thick of the process. He's involved in every aspect - from songwriting to the selection of microphones - but he never lets these other jobs get in the way of the music. "I think when you have a song, it's incumbent on the musician to let that emotion speak through whatever instrument you're playing and to be expressive," he says.

In 2011, with The Killers on hiatus, Ronnie stepped out from behind the kit to prove his songwriting credentials, singing and playing guitar on his own *Big Talk* album. The Killers have just released fourth studio album *Battleborn*, but when *Rhythm* sat down for a chat with Ronnie it was just ahead of the release of their previous album, 2008's *Day And Age*.

## What is The Killers' songwriting process like?

"This time we'd done demos for most of the stuff. We came in with these ideas, most of them tracked at home, in spare bedrooms or basements, then we brought them in, re-recorded them as a band, made an arrangement and made them better."

## How do you achieve the drum sound you want?

"[For *Day And Age*] I was doing a lot of experimenting on my own in my home studio, which has grown into an efficient, nice place to do recordings. I was messing around with compressors and mic techniques, head choices and dampening, sizes of drums - things like that. I was looking forward to doing whatever was best for the song as far as sounds go. I've really enjoyed working with compressors lately and how they make the drums and the cymbals sound. I was really into cranking the compression, so when you crash on a big cymbal you get a 'boosh' sound instead of 'tish'.

"I used lower-tuned snare drums. I tried out different sizes of kick drums, from 18" to 26". It's nice to play around in the studio. We did so much preparation with the arrangement of the songs that when we got to the studio it was very comfortable. Even though the songs had changed so much, you still felt confident enough to play around a little bit. We didn't use a lot of mics. For *Sam's Town* we sometimes used 20 mics for drums and in this situation I don't think we used more than nine. Two songs were recorded with hi-hat mics, for the rest the overheads caught the hi-hats and I liked the compression on the overheads so much, I didn't have to worry about losing the hi-hats. We used a lot of Earthworks mics, especially for the overheads. I like to use a lot of the cheaper microphones, like Onyx microphones, which are only about 70 bucks. We used Josephson mics on the snare, which were nice too."

## You used timpani on *Day And Age*'s 'Dustland Fairytale'. Did you explore any other percussion instruments?

"Daniel de los Reyes lives here in Vegas, we became friends earlier this year. We did this song called 'Joyride' and he's just a crazy good percussionist. I don't know how to play bongos and congas that well and he's half-Cuban so he knows how to do that stuff instinctively. We went into the studio for a few days and took all these different types of ethnic drums. We laid down timbales, congas, even some cajon parts on the song 'I Can't Stay'. We brought in these African drums, kind of like taiko drums, big boomy rope-tensioned drums. We kept playing the track over and over and we had a field day playing all this percussion, finger cymbals, claves, all different types of shakers. He was really instrumental in bringing ethnic percussion in, because it gave us the chance to screw around with it, and we kept a lot of it in."

## Why did you switch to Craviotto drums?

"This is the first record that I've done using all Craviotto drums. They're apples and oranges - you've got ply drums versus solid drums. It's really just a preference. Obviously I like drums of all kinds but I think the ones that really suit my ear and tickle my fancy are the Craviottos, the solid shells. Some drummers like to hear head sound but I like to hear the wood and the Craviotto drums deliver an honest, pure sound. It's one solid piece, there's nothing getting in the way, there's no glue, it's just the wood."

## You've got an extra mini-kit to the side of your main set. What's that for?

"That's a 18"x14" kick drum, a solid ash drum. There are a few songs we do live that needed a different tone, which I couldn't replicate with the main kit. I ripped it off - Steve Jordan has a similar set-up. I didn't want to have this big kit, so I got the idea to have a different kit off to the side. I can turn to my left and have another bass drum right there, another snare and another hi-hat and ride cymbal. It really works out, you can swap the snare drum to change the complexion of it."

## So you switch snares during a show?

"I bring four or five snares out. I think changing the snare drum changes the whole complexion of the kit. It's really neat to be able to bounce back and forth with sounds during a live show, so I'll bring several different types of Craviotto snare drums with several different tunings and switch them from song to song. I've got a brass snare that's awesome. I'll probably dampen a floor tom for 'Human', throw a shirt over it or something to achieve that sound live."

## Has the fact that some of you now have families changed the way the band works?

"Now we're finally able to afford to bring people over

with us when we're travelling abroad. The hotels are a little nicer and it makes it easier for your travelling companions to come along. It's not like they're out there all the time, it's just a little more frequent. Especially now that some of us have kids, one of the things we realise after being gone for so long is that family is so important. To bring them out and spend time with your family while you're still doing your job as a musician is important. I brought my little brother out. He'd never been over to Europe, so I brought him out for three weeks. You come home, it's a strange feeling. You don't realise you were gone for so long. Everybody's a little bit older, people are having kids. When you're setting up a record it's tough to turn down TV shows and opportunities - you want to get out there and support the record. At the same time you want to be with your friends and family. We try to balance being able to spend time with the people we love."

## Do you ever use friends and family as a sounding board for the new material?

"Last week I sat my dad down and had him listen to the album. He liked every song but the last one, which is typical of my dad. Sometimes when you're making a record you're in so deep you lose your scope and you need to rely on other people. You bounce it off your friends, 'Does this suck?' or 'Does this move you at all?' There's a nice inner circle we're able to do that with and luckily we've had some positive comments so far."

## So what sort of music does your dad like?

"Anything by Steely Dan. He's got his own views on music, that's for sure. My dad thinks he knows everything about music. He hasn't caught up to modern day music. He's always asking why the four of us aren't doing massive harmonies. 'You all have voices, why don't you all sing?' Well dad, that's the way it is."

## What's the best drumming advice you've ever been given?

"One of the things I learned early on and was reiterated in school, was to be musical. Especially with drums it's very easy to not be musical. You can just hit and make noise. It's real important to have a dynamic and sensitivity in the drums. The best advice that I ever got was to be musical whatever you do and to be able to back it up." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Killers, *Big Talk*  
**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Killers *Hot Fuss* (2004), The Killers *Sam's Town* (2006), The Killers *Sawdust* (2008)





# Joey Jordison

Slipknot's masked sticksman, music obsessive and multi-instrumentalist constantly tops polls as one of the world's finest exponents of modern metal drumming

WORDS: JORDAN MCLACHLAN

**T**he metal drum superstar was voted Greatest Drummer Of The Last 25 Years in a 2010 *Rhythm* poll. Joey's a busy man, too, playing not only with masked metal madmen Slipknot but his own band Murderdolls and Rob Zombie, sometimes on the same gig...

*Joey, is it odd to find yourself considered as influential a player as the guys you grew up listening to?*

"It is, totally. It's weird to realise that when I put something out - with any band I play with - the fans study it, just like I did with Black Sabbath or Mott The Hoople or Iron Maiden or Slayer. They're totally into it and it's a great feeling."

*You have said that you're obsessed with music.*

"It's an addiction man. Music really does fuel me, it's my lifeblood. I wake up and it's there - I'll have a random song running through my head first thing in the morning, like something from the 1970s or '80s that I haven't even heard for years. And I have dreams about music, about songs that got me started when I was a kid. Recently, when we were working on the Murderdolls record, I'd open my eyes and realise that I had guitar parts for 'Blood Stained Valentine' or 'Bored 'Til Death' running round my brain. It never leaves me."

*Sounds like it might drive you insane.*

"It's cool with me, but it's caused issues with other people. Ex-girlfriends would see me when I sleep - and I'm a deep sleeper, nothing wakes me up - and I would be playing drums and singing in my sleep. I don't remember it, but I do. And people ask me why I won't go out, go to an amusement park, do stuff, have fun. But I can't, music is the only thing. It's kind of like a problem, but it sustains me. And it's been the same for me for as long as I can remember. There's never been a time that I haven't been completely surrounded by music and music-making. It stems right back to even before I was born, I think!

"My parents were blasting music all the time, so it was ingrained in me from as early as I can remember. I learned to use a record player at three years old, before I could speak. I was fascinated by rhythms and the sounds on my parents records, but it came naturally to me. It wasn't a case of getting to an age when my friends were listening to music and starting to hear stuff I loved, I'd grown up with it."

*The guitar has always played a key role in your career too. How do drums and guitar marry up for you?*

"Well, I write on guitar, of course, and it's a very 'freeing' instrument to me. I guess because I've done it for so long I don't struggle with it. When I play drums I am very focussed and it's an aggressive thing for me. I'm in a very specific zone when I play drums."

"Hand on heart, I love drums more than anything. I live and breathe them and I'm lucky because I get to do both, to satisfy both sides of my musical character. When I'm writing on guitar, I always know what the drums are going to be doing. I can hear parts in my head very quickly as I'm coming up with riffs. So when I get going I can end up with a finished song pretty quick I guess. It's a nice benefit of playing both instruments."

*You've always been a driving force in Slipknot as far as writing is concerned, and Murderdolls as well. Do you have to be in the right headspace to allow you to create material?*

"Dude, I'm always in the right headspace! I live pretty much in isolation, so there are really no distractions. That's not a manufactured thing, it's just the way I live. I don't use a computer for anything other than recording, so there's no MySpace, email or surfing to take up my time. And I don't use the phone a lot. And I hate texting, so my head's pretty free to be creative as and when."

"At my house I don't have clocks and everything's blacked out, so I never really know what time it is. Enough light comes in for me to have a clue as to whether it's morning or evening by where the sun is, but I don't live by a clock. I'm a night owl, so I tend to stay up all night when I'm at home and that's when the good stuff happens. Just jamming around real freely and seeing what comes out. I'll go to bed at around 5am, I guess - that's a pretty typical routine for me when I'm not on tour or rehearsing."

*You're also a producer, having taken the helm for Roadrunner United and 3 Inches Of Blood's Fire Up The Blades...*

"I love being involved in the whole creative process, and that has always extended to how things are recorded and mixed and the decisions it takes to bring an album together in the studio. I've always been the first one in the studio in the morning and the last one to leave in the evening. I just want to learn everything, so that has led to me working hands-on with engineers and producers all the way along. I can work Pro-Tools really well, even though I suck at the computer. Using it to record music just connects to my brain, where it doesn't with any other application. Understanding how the technology works gives you so much more control over the material and opens up creative opportunities that you're cut off from otherwise. And I really enjoy it."

*You've also been playing with Rob Zombie, with Murderdolls supporting - meaning you're doing double duty each night.*

"Playing with Rob Zombie is a great experience and it's a killer band. It shows another side of my playing which is more straightforward than with Slipknot, obviously. It's real fun. As far as playing guitar with Murderdolls and drums with Zombie on the same night, people are like,

'Man how do you do all this without taking a break?' But it's just how I live my life. I want to fit all this stuff in and not turn down opportunities. It's just another challenge. I know I can do it and I look forward to these kinds of situations. They're the kind of things that improve you as a musician and take things to another level, so you have to say yes where you can. It's only 35 minutes that I'll be playing with Murderdolls on guitar, then a break, then up with Rob, it'll be fine. The thing is, I don't know what else I'd be doing. If I take a break I get bored - I like things to push me."

*Are there points in your career where you got that push and stepped up your game?*

"I have to say that with all of the Slipknot stuff, when I'm away from it for a while and then listen to one of the records it always amazes me how we pulled it off. From the writing to getting nine members working together to recording and making decisions in the studio to getting a finished product, it's a huge deal. And I'm so proud of what we've achieved in that band."

*Slipknot bass player Paul Gray's untimely death must have been devastating...*

"The first thing I want to say is to thank you to the fans around the world for their support and for the love of Paul Gray. He was my best friend in the world. And there will be another Slipknot record, because if there wasn't it would be the most disrespectful thing we could do to our friend. That guy would never want us to stop. Me and Paul were a songwriting team. Not to take anything away from the other guys at all, but it was a partnership between the two of us. So working on the next record will be very emotional and very strange for me, because he's not around. We all miss him, and that will be a time when those feelings are real strong."

"We have such great support from fans around the world and it's times like this when it really shows. It's an amazing thing for our band to have touched so many, really. If I didn't have the fans, the music, the bands I'm involved with, I don't know where I'd be. The fans really push us to challenge ourselves, and me as a player, all the time and it's what keeps me alive. So I have to say a huge thanks to them, and to *Rhythm* readers for treating me and my band so well. The UK has always been great to us and it's important for me to acknowledge that here." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



*Hope Is Gone* (2008)

### RELATED ARTISTS:

Slipknot, Murderdolls, Rob Zombie

### CLASSIC CUTS: Slipknot

*Iowa* (2001), *Slipknot All*





# Jojo Mayer

The Swiss drum'n'bass pioneer and one of the world's top drum tutors has speed, chops and, most importantly, incredible technique

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**A**s a pioneer of live drum'n'bass, Jojo Mayer's speed of hand and foot, precision and sound and ultra-hip beats inspire drummers worldwide. With the 2007 release of his DVD, *Secret Weapons For The Modern Drummer - A Guide To Hand Technique*, Jojo became teacher to a whole generation.

Born in Switzerland to a musical family, by 17 he was playing with international jazz artists after he was spotted by pianist Monty Alexander, and by the age of 24 he'd relocated to New York. It was here that his already advanced musical skills, his desire to think outside the box and embrace new cultural ideas - allied to his multi-media skills in production - put him on the cutting edge. Jojo developed the idea of 'reverse engineering', finding ways to express digitally-created beats live on his Sonor drum kit. He founded the successful club/party 'Prohibited Beat' and really began turning heads, and with his band Nerve he has been slowly winning an international audience.

## *Jojo, your DVD is possibly the best, most educational technique DVD ever made.*

"Well I think it's one of the few *educational* DVDs that have been made. Because most drum educational DVDs are not educational DVDs, they are showcases. This DVD is not about me, it's for people who want to learn something. When I came to New York 20 years ago I was looking up people who could show me some things that were hard to obtain over here [in Europe] and I was fortunate to cross paths with people like Jim Chapin. I wanted to make an acquisition of American drum culture and technique, because it's mostly been developed over there, by people like Moeller, Gladstone and GL Stone. Some of those things really helped me to express myself better, more effortlessly. So I wanted to make a video that consolidates everything, have all that in the same place. People say, 'You made the Bible,' which is exactly *not* what I wanted to do. I want the opposite. This is a scientific or philosophical essay on the physicality of drumming. And I want drummers to participate in starting to think about technique in a different way. By offering them the basics I'm challenging drummers to use their imagination to come up with their own way of playing. I'm not telling anyone to play the way I do, because that's not how technique works. Everybody has to do things according to their own physicality. I'm trying to give people knowledge, tools and choices, so they can put their own thing together."

## *You've revealed many techniques which were unfathomable to the average drummer. For example, Buddy Rich's left hand movement.*

"The principal is what Buddy did. It's my version, but pretty close to Buddy's. But he was a freak of nature, some people have certain abilities from the way their body is. But you don't need those. My hands are not

fast naturally, which is why I got interested in my technique, because I'm actually slow. I don't really have fast twitching muscles. I've previously had students who put their left foot on the hi-hat and go like a machine gun - they had fast-twitching muscles. I don't, so I have to use a different tool."

## *In days past drummers didn't give away their secrets so readily.*

"What makes me as a player is the way I'm able to emote and express myself, how I look on certain things, make choices and react to situations. Those are the real secrets. There are people who don't have anything but technique and that's why they are protective, because if you are the world's fastest drummer but unable to back a singer with a slow blues, people will not call you. So then when you're no longer the world's fastest drummer, no one's interested in you anymore. So you'd better not give your secrets away! The beauty of music is that it's not about who is the best, but who has some cool ideas."

## *Many drummers will be astounded that you never had lessons...*

"[I learned] by observation and analysis. Most people don't know how to listen. They don't have the patience to try to understand. If you pay attention then the world opens up and lets you into the most secret of secrets. But if you are incapable of doing that, then the world will remain a mystery and someone will read to you from a set of rules to obey. I don't obey any rules other than the ones I feel in my heart make sense."

## *You started drumming as a child?*

"My dad is a jazz bass player and I grew up into that lifestyle. I woke up every other night with my parents in the living room having jam sessions."

## *When did you move to New York?*

"I took the plunge when I was 24. A friend was at film school and he said get your ass over here, stay with me free for three months. It was tough, but in a different way from how I anticipated. I expected some Vinnie Colaiuta on every street corner, but that wasn't the case. I realised there weren't many drummers who could do what I did. And I quickly realised it was not all about that anyway. Then I went back home and saved money for a year so I could sustain myself. I kept my overheads low and played every gig I could. First I did experimental stuff, but it was not what I wanted to play, which was fusion. I got the chance to do that with Mike Stern and Wayne Krantz, but for me the jazz scene quickly deteriorated. I realised that I came 40 years too late. I got more into what was strong, which was the black rock thing - Vernon Reid, the scene around Living Colour, Fishbone and Bad Brains. I hooked up with Dave Fiuczynski and founded Screaming Headless Torsos and worked with Meshell Ndegeocello for three years.

"Then I was into the r'n'b scene, but I exited because I got uncomfortable as a sideman. I got a break leftfield, being able to produce TV jingles. And then this whole drum'n'bass and electronic thing came along. I realised this was a new language. I began on a small level and it just exploded, literally. I started with a couple of friends, DJs and Vernon Reid, who came down and jammed. The first night we had 40 people, second night 65, the third 90 and the fourth it was packed. The capacity was maybe 120 and after three months there were 200 people mashed up inside with 200 lined up around the block. I called it 'Prohibited Beat' - the beats that if you play anywhere else you get fired! All these lifestyle magazines came down: *Playboy*, *BlackBook*, *The New York Times*. But I got no attention from the music press for two years."

## *You'd have thought they would love it.*

"It was off the radar for them. They were looking elsewhere for new music and the DJ culture didn't really review it because it was live music, although it was DJs who put us on the map. It was a cool scene - celebrities, models, designers, photographers, and obviously at some point drummers started to show their faces. After eight months we moved into a bigger place. We did it for two years and created a whole pool of downtown musicians. Drummers like Zach Danziger and Tony Verderosa played. MC Foxy came over from London. Drum'n'bass was totally new for the States."

## *So at last you'd found yourself musically?*

"Well somehow, yes. Thank you Tony Williams and thank you John Bonham, but now I have something I can offer, an authentic contribution, because nobody else did it. No one played Amen Breaks to the extent we did. I started in 1995 - I wouldn't claim to be the first drum'n'bass drummer, but as far as I know I was! One reason my drum'n'bass stuff got so much attention is because I re-introduced a kinetic experience back into the music. I'd seen Phitek spin and it was not so much to look at. I don't see myself as a drum'n'bass drummer. That was a 'gate'. I'm always leaning towards electronic music, there are really interesting things going on, like dubstep. Most experimental people are still in the niche areas of electronic music. Texture is the new frontier right now." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Nerve, Screaming Headless Torsos, Michelle Ndegeocello

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Nerve *Prohibited Beats*

(2007), Jojo Mayer *Secret Weapons For The Modern Drummer* (DVD, 2007)





# Paul Cook

He helped invent punk with The Sex Pistols, sparked national outrage and got himself crossed off the Queen's Christmas card list. Still, Never Mind The B\*\*locks, Here's Paul Cook...

WORDS: RICH CHAMBERLAIN

**N**owadays it seems hard to imagine a band making such an impact. Before they'd even released an album or completed a full tour, the Sex Pistols were public enemy number one. The band's snarling attitude, wry songwriting and blistering playing helped invent punk, but it also landed them in plenty of hot water. Within a couple of years it was all over for the Pistols, but it didn't end there for drummer Paul Cook. In the years since the release of *Never Mind The B\*\*locks*, Cook has worked with ex-Pistols, '80s heroes and classic rock icons.

## *You hadn't been drumming for long when the Pistols started, were you learning on the hoof?*

"We never had time to develop as musicians, which was okay really because that developed our sound. We just kept it direct and straight and got that off to a tee before we had time to get too technical about things and learn our instruments. That came later. I hadn't been playing for long at all before the Pistols really broke big. It was listening by ear and picking things up. It was pretty raw when we recorded *Never Mind The B\*\*locks*. We just had to go in there and knock it out as only we knew how. That's the beauty of it, really."

## *What drummers were you into at the time?*

"We were kids of the '70s, the glam rock scene and all that. We listened to Bowie, Roxy Music, The Faces and all that great stuff. A lot of soul as well and reggae. I listened to all of those drummers, Paul Thompson, Simon Kirke from Free, Al Jackson I really liked as well, I thought he was a brilliant drummer. Motown drummers as well I thought were really cool, with all those little rolls. When I was learning I cocked my ear to all that sort of stuff."

## *The Pistols recorded several demos before touring, was that a big help in tightening up?*

"[Demo producer] Chris Spedding was a great help. I remember him telling us to keep it even more simple than we were playing. He said that about my drumming because I was just accenting everything that Steve [Jones, guitar] was playing because we were very in tune with each other. But Chris said to just keep it simple and play 4/4 because that was the power of the band. He was right."

## *What was the approach to writing during the Never Mind... sessions?*

"We'd all be sitting around in Denmark Street and people would throw ideas about. Glen would come up with a riff, John [Lydon, vocals] would be in the corner scribbling his lyrics, and we'd bash out the arrangements. I know it sounds pretty ridiculous but it all just clicked together, it was so easy it was unreal. We didn't spend much time on them at all."

## *Did you realise how strong those songs were at the time?*

"I knew that they were quite good songs, but I don't think we realised how good. Because of all of the adverse publicity with the band, the music sometimes got overlooked a little bit. Everyone thought we were just making headlines for the sake of it and people would just read the headlines and ignore the music because people thought the music was crap when it first came out. It wasn't until later that people gave us credit for the album. It was not a bad bit of musicianship, if I don't mind saying so."

## *Did it add to the Pistols myth, that people couldn't see you live?*

"You couldn't write a better script. Everyone thought we were doing it on purpose. 'Oh they don't want to play live because they can't play.' John was holed up in a hotel in Chelsea, we couldn't go out. The paranoia started to set in and it was quite a dark time."

## *Does that make it all the more satisfying to hear 'Pretty Vacant' played at the Olympic opening ceremony in front of the Queen?*

"It's great that we left that legacy. There was a danger at the time that it could have been swept under the carpet. It did get forgotten about for about 10-15 years when the '80s came along. I think people were glad to see the back of punk. It wasn't until the 10th or 15th year anniversary that people started to realise how important the punk thing was."

## *The fuss you caused seems unthinkable now.*

"I don't know if anyone could do that again. I don't know how to explain it to people who weren't there at the time. It was a heavy place at the time with all the turmoil, the strikes, the stuff we grew up with. If you look at clips now of the '70s, it looks like an alien country. We came out of all that turmoil."

## *After the Pistols split you and Steve formed The Professionals.*

"It was difficult knowing what to do after the Pistols. It was a relief in one way knowing it was over. But then we thought, 'What now?'. Virgin still wanted to keep me and Steve. It was pointless trying to find another singer after having John, so Steve carried on with vocals. That was a good band. It was hard work and again things didn't go right for us. We went to tour the States and had a big car crash which derailed us for a year or so. By this time Steve was getting out of control with his drug use so that was the demise of that band. I think we made a good album and people still like it. It's a pity we didn't give it more of a go."

## *The end of The Professionals marked the beginning of a difficult period for you.*

"That was 1982 or '83, after that was a bit of a

wilderness time for me. I was sitting round scratching my arse wondering what to do. I'd given up really. I think people were still scared of the Pistols and scared to approach me. Eventually I got involved with Matthew Ashman and the guys from Bow Wow Wow. We got together and formed the Chiefs Of Relief, which was a totally different type of music. It was rock with pop and rap and a dance feel to it. It was a challenge. I was thinking, 'Can I do this?' But I was up for it. I liked the music that was coming out from it."

## *How did you hook up with Edwyn Collins?*

"I was doing an album with Vic Goddard and Edwyn Collins was producing. Ed was touring Japan and asked if I wanted to do it with him. It was strange because I'd never really heard any of his stuff. That was another challenge because it was different again to what I'd been doing. It was a bit nerve wracking. Everyone thinks as a drummer you can just slip in, but this was so different to the rock format."

## *Then there was the 1996 Pistols reunion...*

"There'd been talk about it forever. The time was right. I didn't think it would happen. John was against it, Steve was in LA. But it just suited everyone at the time, everyone was at a loose end and it felt right. That was nerve wracking as well. We rehearsed like f\*\*k! We wanted it to sound great. It was a big thing. Our first big show was at Finsbury Park in front of a London crowd. We rehearsed in LA for ages. We're all a bit OCD in the band and wanted to sound great. I think we pulled it off. Finsbury Park was one of my best memories ever."

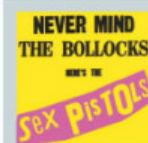
## *It was a good chance to put the myths about the band not being able to play to bed.*

"It was great to play in front of big audiences and sound how we wanted with a big power-PA. In the clubs we didn't have a chance. The PAs back then were crap and we were probably too loud for them and it was a bit of a noise sometimes."

## *Could there be more from the Pistols?*

"Whether it'll happen again, I don't know. But for me it's getting very tiring physically. I'm 56, punk rock is a young man's game! I like to give it all physically. You can't mess around with those songs, you've got to get stuck into them." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Sex Pistols, Chiefs Of Relief, The Professionals

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Sex Pistols *Never Mind*

*The B\*\*locks* (1977), *The Professionals* (1980)







# John 'JR' Robinson

One of the most recorded session drummers in history, his metronomic timing and awesome groove graced some of the biggest hits of the late-'70s and 1980s

WORDS: RONAN MCDONALD/DAVID WEST

**G**racing hit after hit in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s was John 'JR' Robinson's unbelievably tight, metronomic drumming – perhaps most famously on Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* album and the USA For Africa 'We Are the World' single. An alumnus of Berklee Music College in Boston, John's career took off with the funk group Rufus, and since then he has worked with, to name just a few, Eric Clapton, Mariah Carey, Seal, David Lee Roth, Madonna, Celine Dion, Alice Cooper, Lionel Richie, George Benson, Anita Baker, Steve Winwood and The Pointer Sisters.

The cornerstone of Robinson's reputation is that his timekeeping is as close to perfection as is humanly possible. He simply doesn't make mistakes. As drum machines began to threaten the pop drummer's very existence, JR's spot-on grooves, delivered with the feel of a great human musician but tightness of a machine, made him the go-to guy for the big pop producers like Quincy Jones. JR gave *Rhythm* the skinny on how some of his most important sessions went down.

## NUMBERS AND MASTERJAM

In 1978, three years into his professional career, John was playing a gig with a show band called Shelter in Ohio when fate dealt him an unbeatable hand.

"Rufus and Chaka Khan came in and saw me play. Then they actually got up on stage with their band minus drummer and played with me, it was great," he laughs. "So I went and played with them at their sound-check the next day. Within a month I'd moved from Boston to Los Angeles. I was going to go to New York, but I'm glad I didn't because I wouldn't really have hooked up with the studio vibe that was already laid out before me in LA."

Here's a brief summary of the whirlwind that followed: John records on Rufus and Chaka Khan's *Numbers*. The next year he records Rufus' *Masterjam*, produced by Quincy Jones. Jones invites him to play on Michael Jackson's unbelievably huge *Off The Wall*.

"After doing *Off The Wall* the phone wouldn't stop ringing," says Robinson. "I started working with all sorts of players and moved over to Warner Brothers. I did an Eric Clapton record, then they asked me to do the first David Lee Roth album. That album was very innovative and shocked a lot of die-hard Van Halen fans."

## OFF THE WALL

It was *Off The Wall* in 1979 that established Michael Jackson as both a legitimate solo artist and a superstar. The man behind the console for that record was Quincy Jones. After they finished *Masterjam*, Quincy asked JR if he would be interested in doing some overdubs on another album he was recording and JR agreed, little knowing the import of what lay ahead when he took his drums down to the studio that day.

With no idea that he was about to make history, JR took his battered Gretsch kit down to Allen Zentz's

Recording Studio. "It was down behind where Record Plant is now in Hollywood, off Santa Monica Boulevard," remembers JR. "It was not a huge room and it had an old Harrison console. The tracking room was not wide but it was more rectangular. The drums would be straight on the right corner and it had this engraved wood pattern on the wall behind it for sound diffusion.

"We brought my drums down to the studio on a Thursday and it was just me, Quincy was in the booth and Bruce Swedien the engineer, and I believe Michael was in there," says JR. "They put the first song up, which was 'Girlfriend' by Paul McCartney. I got my licks and I nailed it. They said, 'Do you want to do another song?' I said sure. So they put up a David Foster, Carol Sager tune called 'It's The Falling In Love' and I nailed that so I got both things done in about three hours. I could see them talking behind the glass and they go, 'What are you doing Monday?' I said, 'Nothing.' They said, 'Do you want to come back and record the rest of the record?'"

On Monday, JR returned to the studio and put 'Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough' onto tape along with keyboardist Greg Phillinganes. "I remember right as we cut it, the feeling that went through me knowing we had just cut a Number One record," says JR. "It's an interesting feeling. Sometimes you know you're playing on a piece of crap and other times you know that you're making history in the present. It's amazing. Michael was there and he was ecstatic."

*Off The Wall* was recorded over a four-month period, according to JR. "They had big budgets. It was a beautiful time in the record industry," he says. "Everybody was coming out of the '70s, there was this dance vibe that groups like the Bee Gees had already set the bar really high with. Quincy would be like our coach. It would be me and Greg Phillinganes and Bobby Watson on bass or Louis Johnson, and the late David Williams on guitar and generally it was that team. Quincy would bring in guys like Michael Boddick or Ian Underwood doing synth but I'd never see those guys. It would always just be the four principals. Quincy would sit us down and say, 'Listen, I know you guys are used to making records but I want 10 hits. I don't want one hit and nine dogs. I want 10 hits.' We'd all look at each other and go, 'Well, okay!'"

JR still singles out 'Rock With You' as his favourite song from his work with Michael.

"Quincy asked me, 'Why don't we get your band [Rufus] and record this next tune?' That happened to be 'Rock With You', so it was Bobby Watson on bass and Hawk Wolinski the keyboard player who wrote 'Ain't Nobody'. So it was Rufus that cut 'Rock With You', Michael's greatest song, in my opinion."

For 'Rock With You', JR was put on the spot to come up with a truly memorable opening for the track.

"Quincy looks at me and he goes, 'JR, I want you to come up with a drum fill that will be forever associated with this song.' I look at him and go, 'Wow, you're not

going to put me under any pressure, are you?' Rod [Temperton, songwriter] had a demo so I took an idea from that and came up with that drum fill. Generally as a drummer when I'm playing in some sort of 16th-note vibe I don't like any triplets going with 16th notes in a pop tune, it just sounds foreign to me. So what did I do? I did exactly that, I combined a triplet with a 16th-note accent on the kick drum and came up with the intro. You could ask any lay person in the world, when they hear that they don't even have to hear the song, they know it's 'Rock With You'."

## HIGHER LOVE

On Steve Winwood's 'Higher Love' the John Robinson feel is almost mechanical in its precision – fellow sessioneer Mike Baird actually refused to believe John when he told him it wasn't a machine.

"I was in New York doing a George Benson record, and Russ Titelman calls me up and asks me to come over and listen to a Steve Winwood track. I went over and listened, and the first track I heard was 'Higher Love', without words yet. It was burning, it had a Jimmy Brailauer drum program going through it. I said I'd like to play on it and I ended up doing five tunes off the album."

Of course, the bit you all want to know about is the intro to 'Higher Love'... and, believe it or not, that wasn't programmed either.

"Russ pieced things together with overdubbed hi-hats, tom fills and cymbals and I wasn't opposed to that because whatever the producer deems necessary for the situation is acceptable, even though, as drummers, we want to play everything at the same time. I did the kick and snare, overdubbed the hi-hat, toms and cymbals and then I just started messing around and doing that intro pattern through the song. All of a sudden it goes quiet and everybody's like, 'Do that, do that!' So I did that top to bottom, and they loved it, so it sounds like it's changing time because it's an edit. You hear it come back later in the correct time. That helped me put my signature on something."

John sits back and thinks for a second. "That's the advantage of being a drummer, you can lay your own style down on a major artist." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Michael Jackson, Rufus & Chaka Khan, Madonna, USA For Africa, Steve Winwood

### CLASSIC CUTS: Michael

Jackson *Off The Wall* (1979), Rufus *Numbers* (1978), Rufus *Masterjam* (1979), Rufus & Chaka Khan *Stompin' At The Savoy* (1983) Steve Winwood *Back In The High Life* (1986)





Rob Stanton

# Vinnie Paul

Twenty years after Pantera's groundbreaking *Vulgar Display Of Power*, Vinnie Paul talks about that classic album, getting back to his roots with Hellyeah and why groove is everything

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**V**innie Paul and Pantera redefined heavy metal in the '90s. He and his guitar-shredding brother 'Dimebag' Darrell had been slogging around the Texas metal circuit for years, learning their craft, and the band's original sound showed the influence of the brothers' childhood heroes Van Halen.

The first breakthrough came in 1990 when the band teamed up with producer Terry Date to create *Cowboys From Hell*, a showcase for Dime's inventive riffs and Vinnie's unstoppable power and deep sense of groove. "One of the things we had to our advantage was that we were really good musicians," says Vinnie. "We spent seven years playing nightclubs before we ever got a record deal, playing all our favourite tunes so we knew how to really get around on our instruments."

Two years later, the band's style and sound reached critical mass on *Vulgar Display Of Power*. The album inspired a legion of imitators and throughout the '90s, Pantera relentlessly pushed the boundaries of metal. When relations with singer Phil Anselmo fell apart, Vinnie and Dime launched Damageplan. Then in December 2004, Dime was murdered.

"My life was lost. I spent eight months at the bottom of a bottle of vodka. I didn't know what to do," says Vinnie. He got back into music by launching his own label Big Vin Records with no one would release *Rebel Meets Rebel*, the collaboration between the brothers and David Allan Coe that was recorded before Dime's tragic death. Then Vinnie teamed up with members of Mudvayne and Nothingface to form Hellyeah.

## How did you develop your distinctive drum sound on *Vulgar Display Of Power*?

"We had the sound in mind that we wanted - a nice attack-drum sound with a tight, deep bottom end and the guitar had to fit with it, no mid-range, just a lot of bite and bottom end. This was back before any digital technology, everything was analogue so there were a lot of miking techniques and gear that we used to help attain that sound. I did crazy stuff like taping silver dollars to my bass drums. I called it glass. It sounded like a glassy attack that nobody else really had. People were putting high-end on kick drums but it sounded like a click to me instead of an attack. We nailed that. Part of that sound too was the AKG-414 microphones. People use those for high-end, for cymbals and acoustic guitars. I knew that it was a really pristine, clear microphone. I said, 'Terry, let's put it on the kick drum and see what happens.' I used them in a figure-eight pattern which means it picks up on the front of the mic and the back of the mic so you've got the attack from the front and the sound from the back head."

## Did you know at the time that the album would be so influential?

"Not at the time. The touring was what we were really into. We toured for a year and a half for the first record

and we learned a lot from touring with other bands that we liked - Exodus, Suicidal Tendencies. We saw the parts of the songs we wrote for *Cowboys...* that really made people move and we incorporated more of that in *Vulgar...* We were hungry. We wanted to kick some ass and tour some more. We never thought about the kind of impact it would have."

## What did you think of *Vulgar Display Of Power* when it was done?

"You never know how a record is going to feel until it is in its fullest form, start to finish. The sequence is so important. We finished the mastering and the first time we listened to it all, the label people were in this mastering lab where they had these huge 24" sub-woofers. It was blisteringly loud, like a jet. We played it and not one word was said in between any songs. You could hear a pin drop. It got right down to the very end of 'Hollow', I looked over and my brother was crying. 'Dude, what's wrong?' He goes, 'Nothing, man. Everything about it is perfect. It's the record I always wanted to make.' The highest it ever got on Billboard was only 44. Our next record, *Far Beyond Driven*, debuts at Number One and sells over 200,000 units, knocks off Ace Of Base and the whole world goes, 'Who's Pantera?' It was exciting times back then."

## Did you feel the pressure when it was time to make *Far Beyond Driven*?

"Absolutely, man! We were our own worst critics. Before we made *Far Beyond Driven* the title was already set. We lived by that. We pushed each other to make the most brutal heavy metal record ever. Still to this day there has never been another record that heavy that's come in at Number One on Billboard. That was my most challenging playing on that record. That's when I came up with 'Becoming' and 'Slaughtered'. Everything I did was always groove-oriented. That's the most important thing in all of the music I've ever been a part of. I don't care how fast you can play. I'm not the fastest drummer in the world, there are dudes who can blow circles around me speed-wise but when I'm writing a part I'm thinking, 'How is this going to move a crowd?' I want my parts to be parts you can air-drum to. I hear a lot of speed metal today and it's just noise to me. It's so fast and there is so much going on, I'm like, 'How does anyone groove to that?'"

## What was happening within the band when Pantera split?

"We played our last show in Tokyo at Beast Feast, I think it was 9 September, 2000. We all said, 'Bye, see you whenever.' We'll all know when it's time to start making another record. We'd known for quite some time that Phil was falling off the ends of the Earth with his drug thing. He had people around him that protected him from the rest of us trying to help and he went off in his own world. Next thing you know he's

putting out Superjoint Ritual and touring for it and yelling, 'F\*\*k Pantera!' on stage. Then he does the Down record and meantime me and my brother are contacting the label trying to figure out if we still have a band or not. The label tried to set up several meetings for us to hash things out and he didn't want to have it. After about a year and a half of that me and my brother said, well, if this is the way the guy is going to be, let's do our own thing, and we started writing the music for Damageplan. We were done with Pantera. He left Eddie and Alex Van Halen sitting on the curb, you know? We started another band, felt really good about it, then went out and got a dose of reality from the fans that all they wanted was Pantera. It was a very difficult road for us. By the end people had started to accept us. We did demos for the new Damageplan record and they were 10 times the songs the first ones were. Everybody knows what happened after that."

## Could those bridges ever be rebuilt?

"No. My brother is not here. If he was still around there was always that 'if' but without him there is no way. Plus I don't have any interest in playing with those two other guys ever again. We're not friends. We don't talk. I've got a lot of reasons. I'm happy doing what I'm doing. I really enjoy playing in Hellyeah. The new record we've just made is the best record we've ever made. It's probably what people expected from us from the start. It's a metal record. We got back to our roots. The first couple of records were a way for us to step outside what we'd done in our previous bands and experiment with something that was more rock and almost country, some Southern Rock and bluesy stuff. We got that out of our system and when we got back together to make this record we said, let's get back to what we do best."

## Are you ever playing at your limit?

"Oh yeah. I used to tell Joey from Slipknot, he's one of my favourite drummers, 'Just remember this, man, be careful of the monsters you build because one of these days you're not going to be the same monster and you're going to go, 'Why did I do this to myself?' On the road, you can be pretty worn out. You look down and you see 'Slaughtered' on the list and it's nothing but feet. You go, 'Why'd I do that?' But we know why - to take it over the top." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Pantera, Damageplan,  
Hellyeah

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Pantera  
*Cowboys From Hell* (1990),

Pantera *Vulgar Display Of Power* (1992),  
Damageplan *New Found Power* (2004)





# Mick Fleetwood

An inspirational force behind many of rock's greatest hits, his legacy is assured thanks to Fleetwood Mac, the band that bears his name with pride...

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**W**hen drummer Mick Fleetwood got together with blues guitarist Peter Green and bassman John McVie they could hardly guess at the phenomenon they were about to unleash. It was 1967 and the British blues boom reigned supreme. All three had recently quit John Mayall's Bluebreakers. Together with slide guitarist Jeremy Spencer they united in Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac. It would become one of the most successful bands of all time, encompassing every style from raw blues to platinum-selling rock and pop.

Given their tangled history, it's amazing that Fleetwood Mac should have survived the slings and arrows of outrageous rock fortunes. And, throughout, the founding father had not only kept the Mac flag flying, he's maintained his position as a musical catalyst. It's a rare role for a drummer but the tall dude with an impeccable English accent has been concerned with perfection as well as attacking the drums.

Mick is from the old school, a wide-eyed hairy monster who cheerfully plays a massive array of super-sized drums. He likes a big sound and his heroes are guys like John Bonham and Jim Keltner. A largely self-taught player, he eschews technical finesse in preference to drive and emotion. It's a style he honed in the r'n'b bands of the '60s. A master of the blues shuffle, he remains one of the most physically distinctive and imposing drummers around.

When Fleetwood Mac debuted at the 1967 Windsor Festival they were stridently confident, and with good reason. Their initial albums *Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac* and *Mr Wonderful* (1968) still sound impressive today, as do their classic chart hit singles 'Black Magic Woman', 'Need Your Love So Bad' and Peter Green's Number One million-seller 'Albatross'.

Despite the departure of Peter Green in 1970 and Jeremy Spencer in 1971, Fleetwood Mac continued to thrive, relocating to America with new members Christine Perfect, Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham. Far from fading away the band went on to create one of the blockbusters rock albums, *Rumours* (1977), with Mick's redwood-like frame towering over Stevie Nicks on the now-classic cover shot.

## How do you balance your roles as drummer, producer and bandleader?

"I'm a drummer first. I don't play other instruments but I do have a lot of ideas about what's right and wrong. I've been able to do that through Fleetwood Mac."

## Are you still in touch with Peter Green?

"Peter's own touring is all finished now and he's taking a rest. He came to the Mac's last gig in England. He is quite objective about the journey he has taken and the difficult conditions he has endured. I'm sure Peter's condition could be incredibly improved. He just has to make choices himself. My opinion is Peter's medical condition was abused for years. I don't think he was

treated correctly and his life literally disappeared from him. He's terrified because he remembers that and the truth is a lot of damage was done that has cost him dearly. I would love to spend some time with him. It was because of his talent that the band Fleetwood Mac existed."

## What inspired you to take up drums?

"Listening to records by Buddy Holly and The Everly Brothers. My father, a wing commander in the RAF, was also very influential. His party piece was playing bottles filled with water. He was always tapping them with a pencil and he'd jingle the change in his pocket. He loved playing a military beat and had a great sense of rhythm. He was the catalyst that made me so obsessed about playing drums. I was just emulating my dad. I remember at family get-togethers he would bring out the bottles and play tunes.

"He was not a drummer but after he passed away my mother sent me a picture of him in a pilot officer's uniform playing a drum kit alongside a bagpipe player. That was pretty wild for me, dad jumping on a kit and doing his thing on the snare drum."

## When you were 11 years old you convinced your parents to buy you your first drum kit. What was it like?

"It was called a Gigster with a bass, snare drum and a 5" cymbal. That was my first kit but it did have hide skins. I left school when I was 15. I wanted to be a musician and my parents were supportive because they knew drumming was something I loved. I practised by playing to the family radiogram up in the attic. They helped buy my new kit. I plonked it in my sister's garage in Notting Hill whence I was heard playing by Peter Bardens who happened to live next door. Peter was a keyboard player and a lifelong friend. He knocked on the door and that's how my career started. He said: 'I hear you've been playing drums.' How could he not! He then said: 'I've got a gig for you.'"

## What were your early groups like and who were your initial influences?

"My first gig was with a band called The Fenders and I had never played with anyone before in my life. I turned up scared stiff with this flashy drum kit, which is I'm sure the reason I got the gig. They were playing instrumentals by The Ventures and The Shadows. My biggest early influence was Tony Meehan of The Shadows. I used to listen to his records like 'Foot Tapper'. Then I listened to Sandy Nelson until I started listening to all the blues stuff. I also listened to the brush work on pianist Mose Allison's albums. Although I'm not a jazz player I do like to use brushes and I used to play in a pub with Peter Bardens and a double bass player. Later I listened to avidly to Sonny Freeman who was the drummer on BB King's album *Live At The Regal*. He was the master of the blues shuffle."

## Didn't you meet up with Rod Stewart at this time?

"I played with Rod for a couple of years. Rod was a star the day he was born. All joking aside he's a genius. It was very evident even in the early '60s that he would be a star. In fact he was a bit of a lazy old bugger - because he was a star. Unloading tons of equipment out of the back of a van on a rainy night was not for Rod. 'Oh my dear, I'm not going to get my hair messed up. I've got to look gorgeous for my public.'"

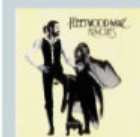
## When did you start to develop a passion for a really big drum sound?

"I always liked to tune down and I used to turn my rack toms round the opposite way so the large one is on the left and the smaller is on the right. The reason being I liked to hit the large rack tom and floor tom together. The combination gives you the effect of hitting two big floor toms. It's all about jungle rhythms. When we had success with Fleetwood Mac and I could afford to live out my fantasies and buy all the drums I liked, I ordered a 30" bass drum. I had all these monster drums made for me. In truth they were like normal drums for me because of my great height and arm length. I've scaled down the sizes these days and find the sound more punchy and contained. Drum microphones are so much more sophisticated now. But I used to have these Godzilla-sized drums. Originally I played Ludwig then I went to Tama and I have been with DW for many years."

## How seriously did you take studying the drums when you were a novice?

"I'm a self-taught player and never studied much, although I practised a lot as a kid. I'm happy when people talk about me as a drummer, that it's not about my technical know-how, but my feel. That's what I pride myself on. John McVie and myself both come from the same mind-set. As long as we're swinging and laying down the beat, that's what makes us happy. Our legacy as musicians is that we play a damn good blues shuffle. If I look ferocious and intense when I'm playing that's because I get my rocks off. I need to be around good musicians to function properly and when it happens, I do have a sense of theatre and drama. It's a part of my make-up and that's what comes out when I play. I may look like some raving monster but I don't care!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Fleetwood Mac

CLASSIC CUTS: Peter

Green's Fleetwood Mac

Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac,

Fleetwood Mac *Rumours*, Fleetwood Mac *Tusk*





# Elvin Jones

One of the most significant jazz drummers of the post-bop era, who worked with the likes of John Coltrane and Miles Davis. *Rhythm* met the legend in 1993

WORDS: SUN SUN LWIN

**E**lvin Jones was a performer whose inventiveness challenged the status quo of an era and, along with saxophonist John Coltrane, launched one of the most significant periods in jazz history.

On stage at Ronnie Scott's, the beats spill from his drums, as Elvin, with a grin five miles wide, bends and dips them with awesome control. Behind each soloist Elvin churns out a percussive pattern so textured and rich it is as elemental as landscape or weather. Musically, he supports every note, relaxing and loosening the intricate, shifting web of interplay only to pull it taut again when the music commands. Nothing escapes him. Whether the urgent young players of his Jazz Machine – Nicholas Payton on trumpet, sax player Greg Tardy, flautist Kent Jordan or William Pickens on piano – thunder down an avalanche of notes or float them out as fine as grains of sand, Elvin's on the case.

Elvin hails from a Pontiac, Michigan family, along with brothers cornetist/composer Thad and pianist Hank Jones: "My father was a deacon of the church. There were 12 of us, six boys and four girls, in the house. We didn't have electricity until I was 10 or 11 years old. We sang together, little quartets, church songs. That's how we entertained ourselves."

Elvin played his first 'professional' gig when he was about 14: "I played in one of my brother's bands: saxophone, drums and piano. That was my first experience of playing. I didn't get any money so I don't know if that constitutes professional!"

After a spell in the army, Elvin returned to civilian life and the serious pursuit of music. He hung out in Detroit at the famous Blue Bird Inn, a favoured jazz joint of the day.

Elvin recalls: "Most of the musicians considered big names – those making records, who played with Duke Ellington, Ben Webster and so on – came down after they had finished their concerts. Everybody played together. One didn't look for famous or even great musicians, just anybody who could play and was available. You might be working next to Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie. It was a very close circuit. People helped each other. That's how the music was learned. Younger musicians learned it from the older ones."

It was the same in New York, where Elvin went in 1956 to audition for the Benny Goodman band. He didn't get to work with Benny, but Miles Davis and Charlie Mingus called. Elvin chose to work with Mingus, and then, when Charlie quit his own band to work with Bud Powell, Elvin followed him.

Elvin first met John Coltrane when he was working with Miles Davis, whom he knew from the Blue Bird.

"At every opportunity I could afford I would go and listen to their music. John was playing something which was completely removed from all the music that I had ever heard before. When I had occasion to substitute for Philly Joe Jones – Miles' regular drummer – in

Philadelphia, John, who was thinking of starting his own group, asked if I'd be willing to play with him one day. I said, 'When you're ready, give me a call.' A few years after that, when John was on tour in California, he flew to New York on his day off to ask me to join his band. I had just had an interview with Dizzy who had asked me to play in his group. So I said, 'Wait up! I'll have to go see Dizzy and talk to him.' Dizzy was playing at Birdland. We went there together and I told Dizzy I couldn't accept his proposition because years before I had promised John I'd play with him. Dizzy was so gracious that he said okay and gave us both his blessing."

## AN EQUAL PARTICIPANT

Elvin grew into his unique style of playing (essentially an extension of the bop approach established by Kenny Clarke, Max Roach and Art Blakey) long before he ever worked with Coltrane.

"It happened early on. I didn't feel comfortable playing conventionally. I talked to my brother Hank about it. He would put on a recording – say, Art Tatum – and tell me to get my brushes and play with that. Just listening and trying to play with it gave me a kind of confidence that's essential for fast tempos. You are almost compelled to relax. If you tighten up, the tempo will be inconsistent. From there on I listened to great drummers. When they played solos it was something exceptional, but in supporting the group with just the regular rhythm, I always felt there was something more that could be done to augment and complement the soloists without interrupting the natural flow of the rhythm. I had many different thoughts about that, from syncopation to whatever. When I stopped playing the simple way, I had to do it all with my left hand. So I started practising."

It was with Coltrane in the 1960s that Elvin's concept of playing drums as a 'free improviser' had its most significant flowering and he emerged as the premier stylist of that period. In the bop style of drumming, the pulse is maintained on the ride and hats, while the drummer's left hand creates patterns to mark out the structure, articulate solos and interject counter-rhythms against the pulse of the remaining instruments. Elvin built upon the role of the left hand, developing a wide array of dazzling polyrhythms of diverse timbre and intensity, improvising with the soloists. He elevated the status of the drummer from mere accompanist to that of equal participant. Liberated from the strict dependency on time, attention was drawn to the rhythmic structure of the piece itself rather than its inherent time signature.

Since Elvin shifted the emphasis from the drummer as 'time-keeper', he's performed his finest work with like-minded bass players, all of whom had the understanding that the drums, bass and piano are, in effect, a single instrument: the rhythm section.

"It is so easy to learn and interpret the music from that premise. We were all serving the music itself. We had to do it together to give the music some meaning, some function, some purpose. I'm never in competition with another musician. My main purpose is to complement the rest of the musicians."

Classic recordings made between 1960 and 1965 with Coltrane include *Africa/Brass*, *Live At The Village Vanguard*, *Live At Birdland*, *A Love Supreme* and *Ascension*, but it is on the latter that the sheer fluidity of Elvin's playing is at its most expressive.

"They were all good times. When I think about it – and I am sure McCoy Tyner and Jimmy Garrison felt the same way – we only existed to go to the stage and play. That was our whole existence. Jimmy was my soul brother, still is. We didn't need to talk. It was akin to telepathy, the rapport was so strong."

So why did this great quartet dissolve? The explanation is both musical and personal. Coltrane's fascination with the drone effect in Indian music led to his adding a second bass to the group, one improvising freely whilst the other played arco with the bow. Later a second drummer, Rashied Ali, was to join Elvin, but this proved the catalyst for Elvin's departure and the forging of a separate destiny.

Ironically, when Elvin got an offer from Duke Ellington and joined him in Frankfurt, he found that the Duke had a second drummer too. After about four or six weeks touring Europe, Elvin left for Paris where he ran into Kenny Clarke.

"He asked me to take his place at the Blue Note club while he went on vacation. I was lucky, stepped right off the plane into a job. When I left that, I decided that if I was going to continue I'd have to find my own feet and form my own band."

Over the next three decades, Elvin formed a series of trios, quartets and sextets, appearing throughout the States, Europe, South America and Japan. When *Rhythm* met Elvin he was 66, and had notched up 52 years of solid drumming experience.

"Music is a catalyst, and jazz especially is one of the catalysts which bind humanity," he told us. "Certainly the potential is there. I have played in front of audiences whose language I couldn't speak and who couldn't speak mine – our only communication was the music. But we were able to understand one another." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



*Together!* (1961), John Coltrane *A Love Supreme* (1964)

### RELATED ARTISTS:

Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, Philly Joe Jones  
**CLASSIC CUTS:** Elvin Jones & Philly Joe Jones





# Ginger Baker

The Cream legend has never been one to mince words, whether it's discussing fellow drummers, his love of African rhythms or the music business

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**G**inger first came to prominence playing rhythm and blues with Alex Korner's Blues Incorporated and the Graham Bond Organisation, but it was with Cream that he experienced his greatest success and popular acclaim. When the supergroup disbanded after just three years, Baker and Clapton went on to form the even more fleeting Blind Faith, after which Ginger turned his talents to a huge range of projects. He has battled heroin addiction, played polo competitively, and lost a fortune. With an abiding love for jazz and African drumming, Ginger has recorded with Afro-beat king Fela Kuti and fusion guitarist Bill Frisell, but he has maintained a connection with rock thanks to stints with Hawkwind and Masters Of Reality. In 1993 Ginger was inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame with Cream, and the trio reformed for a series of dates in 2005, showing that the decades had done little to dilute the fervent adoration the band has always attracted.

He recently played Ronnie Scott's with a band that included percussionist Abass Dodoo, bassist Alec Dankworth and saxophonist Pee Wee Ellis, and in April 2012 Ginger took part in the Buddy Rich memorial concert at the London Palladium. *Rhythm* got to chat with the legendary drummer just ahead of that show.

## Is Buddy Rich a hero of yours?

"No. We had a big row about Dusty Springfield, who was a very nice girl, not a great singer but Buddy Rich destroyed her on the microphone when they were on the same bill. I was very angry so when I was asked how Buddy played, I said, 'He plays great for a guy with only one leg.' He never kept his hi-hat going. If he was playing anything, his hi-hat stopped."

## Did you like his playing?

"Not overly, I'm afraid. My bag is Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, those guys. Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich were two of the 'great white hopes', if you like. They didn't gel with me terribly. Gene Krupa got everything he did from Baby Dodds and Baby Dodds played it better."

## You have said that you conceived of the band's music as jazz, but is it fair to say Cream's influence was felt by rock musicians?

"I don't know. You can tell it's me and you can tell if it's not me. The heavy metal thing, giving birth to that, we should have aborted it. We should have aborted that kid. I hate heavy metal."

## What keeps you playing at 72? Your legacy is secure.

"Yeah, but it doesn't work like that unfortunately. You need money to live. A fool and his money are soon parted. I've parted with all my money so I have to go back to work at 72. I should have died, it would have been a lot easier."

## Do you still enjoy playing?

"I haven't touched my drums for a couple of months until today but I can play. You don't need to practise when you've got it. The only reason I practise is to get my arms a bit stronger so that I can get through a whole gig."

## Is your interest in African rhythms part of what makes your style so distinctive? You're not just coming from a Western musical place.

"Phil Seamen turned me onto that in the early 1960s. The first day I met Phil he took me back to his flat and played me all his African things. He said to me, 'Christ, I've tried to show this to so many people and you're the first guy who's got it,' which made me feel good. Unfortunately it's not there in South Africa [where Ginger lived for 12 years], it seemed to stop before it got that far south. It's there all over North Africa and West Africa but down there it seems to have gotten lost somewhere, it was very disappointing."

## Has it become tougher to earn a living as a musician?

"The record companies have got everybody by the b\*\*\*\*\*ks because they've got distribution. It's easy enough to go in a studio and make a record but if you want to distribute it worldwide you need a record company. That's why they take the major cut of the record. Now we're getting something like 14 percent of 100 percent - 86 percent goes to the record company. Way back with Cream it was four-and-a-half percent of 90 percent, for what they call 'Breakages' and stuff."

## Cream were inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame - was that important to you?

"No. I mean I've got more awards than I've got money. Having a Grammy on the mantelpiece, what does it mean really?"

## Do you think your playing has changed much over the years?

"Not really. I find after laying off for a while then going back to playing, different things happen. That's why I don't like practising, because you practise and then you end up playing what you're practising."

## But you must have practised at the start?

"There was a period where I practised for eight hours a day every day for a couple of years. That was in 1959 or 1960, but if you can play what you want to play, what's the point of practising? One beat can mean more than 24 if it's in the right place. It's where you put them that matters, not how many of them you put."

## Not repeating yourself every night - is that about confidence?

"I play depending on what the people I'm playing with play. You listen - that's what a drummer does. It's the

drummer's job to make the other guys sound good. Baby Dodds said that, years ago. You listen to the other guys and you complement what they're playing. That can lift them up."

## When you look back on your career, what stands out?

"Playing with Phil [Seamen], playing with Elvin Jones, playing with Art Blakey and playing with Max Roach. All of them became very close friends of mine. There's a great thing I did with Art Blakey in 1972, it was completely unrehearsed. It started off as a drum battle and ended up with us both going on to play exactly the same thing at exactly the same time and it just took off. We played together through to the end, complementing each other. It was a great experience. That was at the Munich Olympic Games Jazz Festival in 1972."

## When did you play with Max Roach?

"Max is just wonderful. I did a gig with Max and Tony Williams in Verona in Italy, playing with Max's band Boom. They were all drummers. The bass player was a pedal timpani, with marimbas and xylophones, vibraphones, it was fantastic. There was a very sad sequel to it because the recording of it wasn't very good and we were going to get together in New York and record it in the studio. When we were supposed to be in the studio in New York, Max and I were in San Francisco carrying Tony Williams' coffin. It was terrible. It was a shock because Tony was younger than I am."

## Are there any younger players you like?

"Dennis Chambers, for sure. I don't listen to music very much at all, unless it is Kelly Rowland. She's fantastic."

## Are you surprised by the devotion that Cream continues to attract?

"Cream was a one-off, let's face it. It had never happened before and it will never happen again. There was just some magic there that was not achieved by anybody. It was still there. The Festival Hall gig was wonderful. When we were doing the rehearsals, they recorded it and played it back, it was like, f\*\*king hell! I thought it was the record we'd done 30-odd years ago. I think it was probably better." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Cream, Graham Bond Organisation, Blind Faith, Airforce, Fela Kuti

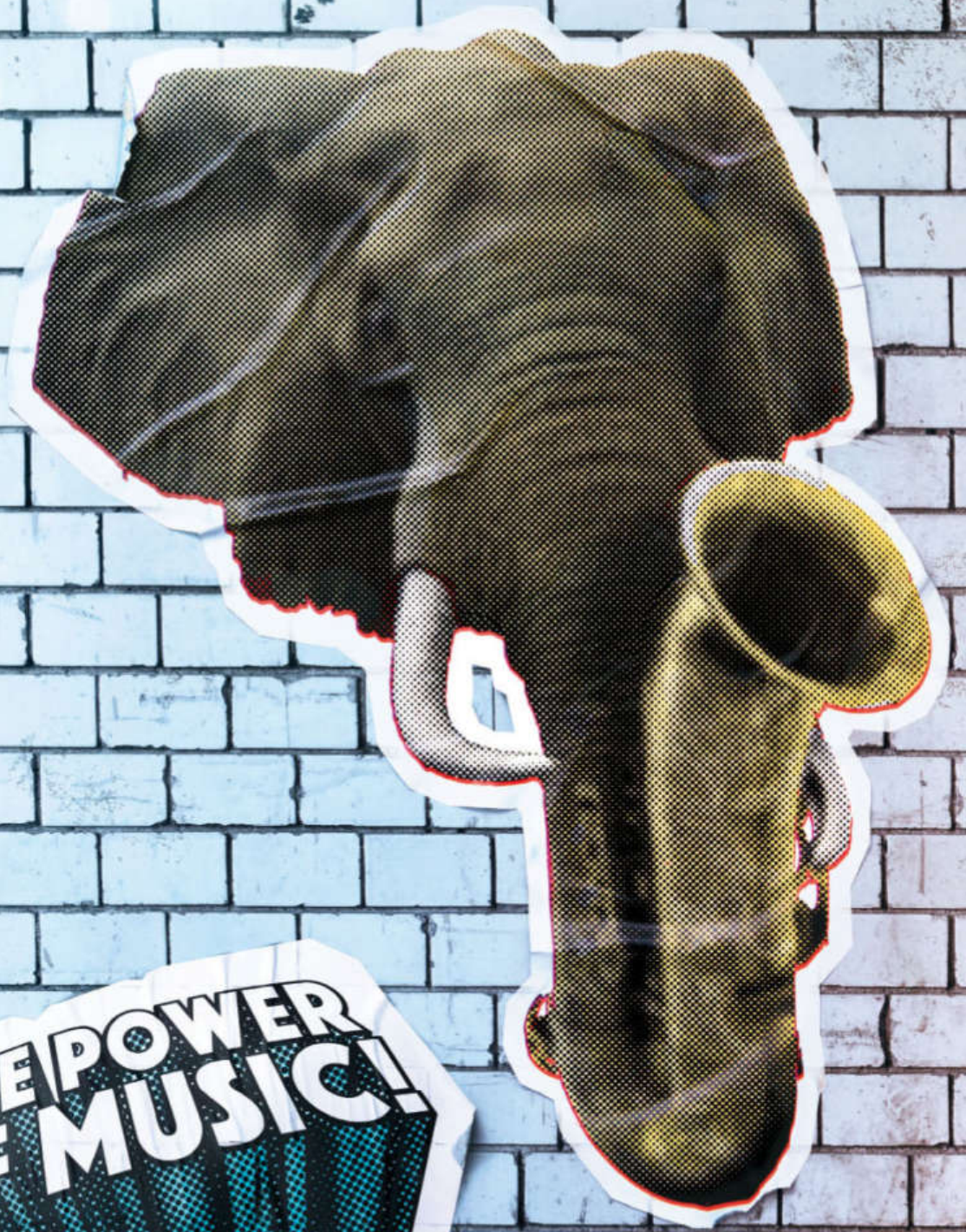
### CLASSIC CUTS: Cream

*Disraeli Gears* (1967), *Cream Wheels On Fire* (1969); *Ginger Baker's Airforce* *Ginger Baker's Airforce* (1970)













# David Garibaldi

Oakland funksters Tower Of Power were fuelled by David Garibaldi's complex yet musical style and mastery of The Funk

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**D**avid Garibaldi is still topping funk drummer polls 39 years after the Tower Of Power man wowed us with his complex yet supremely musical style, concept of beat permutation and mastery of the ghost stroke.

Garibaldi was born in Oakland, California. Aged eight he wanted to play the trumpet. "But there were no trumpets so they gave me a violin. That was like a poke in the eye with a sharp stick!" Instead he took up drums at 10 and found that by age 17 he could make money playing them. He joined Tower Of Power in 1970. The powerhouse 10-piece outfit from the Bay area set an unassailable standard with its blend of funky grooves, super-tight horn arrangements and melodic soulful vocals. Alongside bassist Rocco Prestia, David forged one of the all-time great rhythm partnerships.

However, by 1980 the familiar tale of drugs and alcohol was destroying the band, and for his own preservation David left, moved down to LA and pursued a session career. He also developed his love of teaching with books and videos. Here was a drummer whose elegant beats weren't just clinic showstoppers but real grooves sparking commercially successful albums. Throughout the years, *Tower Of Power* kept going with a succession of drummers, although it always felt like they were keeping the seat warm for the master's return, which duly took place in 1998.

## *The band was reinvigorated by your rejoining.*

"They had some lean years related to drug abuse and alcohol. That's why I left in 1980. [By 1998] everyone had got rid of the drugs, everyone was totally healthy. I remember one of the first times back in London and there was a line of people around the block. They were turning people away and we were in shock."

## *You and Rocco manage to be complex and yet keep the resulting groove clean.*

"To play with Rocco is a relationship that musicians dream of. We don't really discuss it. It does what it does – an awesome feeling."

## *You took the funk idea of beat displacement further with your concept of 'permutation'.*

"It started when I was in college. I had an instructor who taught us about beat displacement on a rudimentary level. I applied that to the drums. I would say if I have any strength in my musical ability at all, it's creativity. I'm never at a loss for ideas. I would always hear something and want to turn it into something else. There's an African concept of playing a rhythm and wherever you hear it, that is beat 'one'. And that is basically the permutation idea, but I organised it my way so I could teach it and help people understand it."

## *And you incorporated it into tunes, turning the beat around.*

"Yeah, that was my big 'revelation' when listening to

Latin music. I realised it was grooving really hard and there's no two and four happening, no drumset in fact. Then I thought, 'Why not try building rhythms like that, that have no conventional anchor points, like the two and four that western drummers use?' And that is kind of how we developed TOP stuff. The barrier was broken by the James Brown drummers, Greg Errico, Zigaboo [Modeliste] and Bernard [Purdie]. That stuff was so fresh and those guys were really in on the ground floor. In the funk and r'n'b tradition, the drummers I liked always had a great left hand. When I finally saw James Brown in 1965, that completely changed everything for me. That is, how the drummer was playing, it was awesome. I had never seen anything like that before, that conversation between left hand and right foot."

## *You also learned from the big band tradition?*

"I loved playing big band music. I tried to copy the way Sonny Payne played in the Basie band. He played that music so well – flashes of showmanship, brilliance and a lot of subtlety. When you play with a funk band our size, with horns, really you're playing in a big band. If young people are going to play music like that they have to learn how to play in a big band."

## *Then you were in the United States Air Force.*

"I went in 1966. At that time we had conscription, but the law allowed you to go into any service so long as you enlisted before your draft day. So I enlisted into the Air Force just so I could get it over with. If I'd joined the army, Vietnam was guaranteed and I was not interested in going there! I auditioned for the band and it was terrific. I learned a lot and we had so much freedom. [After that] I joined a local band playing in Jack London Square in downtown Oakland. That was where I first met Mike Clark, the [Thrust] drummer with Herbie Hancock. We took turns at getting kicked out of the band. Then a couple of guys from Tower Of Power sat in and they said they were changing drummers, would I be interested? I went along and fell in love right away. I knew I was gonna be in it even before they said I had the gig. On 23 July, 1970 I did my first [TOP] shows."

## *You made a major impression.*

"We were growing fast, plus all we did was music, 24 hours a day. We were together all the time and we rehearsed literally every day, or we were recording or doing a show. And if the band wasn't busy I was practising, taking lessons. I wanted to be the drummer that my heroes were, that was what drove me. The band was the vehicle for all that growth we were experiencing, like putting gas on a fire."

## *You always had that disciplined work ethic?*

"There was a kind of disciplined indiscipline. And when we added Chester Thompson, that was a turning point because he was a real jazz musician who could play the Hammond B3. He was schooled and even though he

was our age, in terms of music years he was way ahead, he could voice chords like a jazz musician. It made everything different. Then we had Bruce Conte on guitar and Lenny Williams singing, and that group was pretty awesome."

## *Was it hard getting the band to accept your convoluted beats?*

"By then everybody had already had their first taste of 'sin', so they were ready to go! Every time I brought in something they said okay, that's the way it is, that's what we're doing, so it wasn't a problem."

## *The 'Man From The Past' outro (1974) still sounds amazing – it isn't until you see a transcription that you realise just how 'backwards' it really was!*

"A great Bay area drummer, Harvey Hughes, and I would get together and exchange beats. We built this hybrid system to challenge each other, building weird beats – and that one came out of our sessions."

## *What about the tour de force of 'Squib Cakes'?*

"It was live in the studio. Back then it took us ages to record anything because we just didn't have the accuracy we end up having today. We'd get part of it right, then blow something. So we tried for a couple of days and weren't getting anywhere, and Emilio [Castillo], the leader, said, 'Okay, we're gonna get this tomorrow morning.' So we got there at 10am and it was the first thing we recorded. I remember having in my mind an idea I was gonna try on a couple of sections that I'd not done before. One take and that was it. That's exactly how the band played live."

## *You frequently top drummer polls to this day, which proves that what you do is still relevant for a new generation...*

"What I try to do is have a respect for the tradition that I grew up in and to give credibility to the style of music I love, try to teach it and leave something behind for other drummers to learn from. I always wanted to be a teacher as well as a player. I think if you have a desire to play at a high level, and if you can, I think you have a responsibility to pass that on. That has been my mission, to pass on the things that I'm learning and show people how easy it is to be yourself." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



To Oakland (1974)

### RELATED ARTISTS:

Tower Of Power

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Tower Of Power *Tower Of Power* (1973), Tower Of Power *Back*





# Phil Rudd

For those about to rock, we salute the undisputed king of the juggernaut power groove, AC/DC's mighty Phil Rudd

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**W**hen cannons roar amid sheets of flame, that's when a rock'n'roll warrior needs nerves of steel to keep him in the firing line. If all this sounds over-the-top, then a trip to the next AC/DC concert will prove our point. Their stalwart drummer Phil Rudd not only has to provide a solid beat for the last great living rock band, he also does it surrounded by perhaps the loudest and most spectacular stage act on the planet. Here is a man who clearly deserves gold medals as well as gold albums. Yet away from the excitement of an AC/DC show and the wild antics of his cohorts, Phil Rudd is a cool, quietly-spoken dude with a twinkling sense of humour. He also has a fierce pride in the band he grew up with and with whom he shared hard-fought battles for success and recognition. While other drummers astound with their pyrotechnical displays of technique, there are few who can provide the kind of rhythmic intensity and propulsive drive that is Phil's speciality.

## HIGHWAY TO HELL

Phillip Hugh Rudd was born in Melbourne, Australia on 19 May 1954. As a teenager his favourite bands were the Small Faces, Humble Pie and Free. Says Phil: "I always liked 'Tin Soldier' by the Small Faces. There's a break when Kenney Jones comes back in on drums, and you really wanna shout, 'Yeah! F\*\*\*ing great!' That's what I've always been about."

Having fallen in love with the drums, he got into a band as soon as he left school. "Within three months of getting my first drum kit I found a couple of guys banging away at a party and asked them if they needed a drummer. That was my first band and it was fun for a couple of years. That band, Charlemagne, covered mainly Humble Pie tunes and their guitarist dearly wanted to be Peter Dinklage. "But it was music we really enjoyed playing. I was with another semi-pro band for 18 months before going back to my day job." Phil had played with The Colored Balls, a skinhead band formed by guitarist Lobby Lloyd and Angry Anderson, the heavily tattooed and bald-headed singer of Rose Tattoo fame. In 1974 the Balls changed their name to Buster Brown and recorded the album *Something To Say*, but Phil had itchy feet.

"One day in 1974 I heard AC/DC were looking for a drummer. Malcolm Young came down to see me and hired me on the spot, and the rest is history. When I joined the band their first album, *High Voltage*, was just coming out. They'd done that with a few different guys filling in on drums."

Rudd joined in January 1975 and his solid, unswerving beat was perfect for the distinctive super-heavy boogie style that AC/DC were developing. Phil was a powerhouse, but he wasn't into soloing or playing fills. "My own favourite drummers were the less spectacular players, best known for their time-keeping, like Ringo Starr, Corky Laing and Simon Kirke from

Free. I never was a solo type. I like it when a band comes in! There are so many different styles of drumming, but I'm pretty set in my ways. What inspires me to play is listening to the band and having a good sound in our playing environment. When it's all happening, a gig just flashes by and a two-hour show seems like half an hour.

"A lot of metal bands play very fast – all that machine gun stuff – and I like to see young guys playing that way. When I was young and first playing I was inspired by the hippie stuff but when thrash metal is done well, yeah, man, it's good. In our band we try to avoid getting stuck in all those categories, like punk or heavy metal. We've kind of swept through them all over the years. We were certainly upstarts.

"In fact, AC/DC upset quite a few well-known bands in the early days. When we were the support bands we'd leave the audiences exhausted. I remember we did a Black Sabbath tour around Europe and, of course, we did a lot of pub gigs in London in our early days. Later on in the States we supported KISS, Aerosmith and Alice Cooper. Did we blow 'em off stage? Well, you've seen us. That's what we do best! We're friendly guys, but we really don't like anyone standing too close to our stage, y'know?"

Phil joined an AC/DC team that included Bon Scott (vocals), Angus and Malcolm Young (guitars) and Mark Evans (bass). After building a solid reputation in Australia they came to London in 1976 and signed to Atlantic Records. A succession of blockbuster albums included *Let There Be Rock* (1977), *Powerage* (1978) and *Highway To Hell* (1979), and the Sydney rebels became one of the biggest touring acts in Europe and America. Their future seemed in doubt when Bon Scott was found dead in a car in London in February 1980, following a night's drinking. The following month, however, the band brought in new singer, Brian Johnson, (ex-Geordie) and recorded *Back In Black*, which became one of their most successful albums ever, selling 10 million copies. This was followed by *For Those About To Rock (We Salute You)* in 1981.

During the sessions for follow-up album, *Flick Of The Switch*, in August 1983, Phil Rudd suddenly left the band. There was talk of an altercation with Angus Young, and there can be no doubt that the shock of Bon Scott's death, the endless touring and rock lifestyle had played havoc with Phil's nerves. He was replaced by 20 year-old Simon Wright, and later by Chris Slade. Phil settled in New Zealand, where he invested in, of all things, a helicopter business, and ended up quitting the music business completely.

## BACK IN BLACK

The call of AC/DC proved strong, however, and he came back into the fold in 1995 to play on *Ballbreaker*, and stayed for *Stiff Upper Lip* (2000) and *Black Ice* (2008).

"Yeah, I was 12 years away from the band. It was quite a while. In fact there was a period of six years

when I didn't play at all. I guess the first phase of being with AC/DC had worn me out! It was continuous touring. For the first three years I was out of the band, I got a helicopter licence and I had a couple of machines out in New Zealand. But they're a pig to own, because you have to keep them going. You can't just leave 'em sitting in the backyard and brush the dust off now and then. They're working machines that you have to keep maintained – if they go wrong it's 40 grand! I had a Hughes 500 and the idea was to hire it out. But I didn't like anyone to get in it with their shoes on, which wasn't good for business!"

Rudd began to think about returning to his roots. Chris Slade was still drumming for AC/DC when Phil bumped into his old rock'n'roll mates in London.

"I went to see the guys in 1991 when Chris was in the band. I hadn't seen them in eight years and we had a great old time. We stayed in the dressing room until 2.30am reminiscing. It was about 18 months after that I got a call to come back. I had been doing some recording again and when George [Young, producer and brother of Angus and Malcolm] heard the tapes, he knew that I was back in business."

There was no problem about Phil picking up the pieces after such a long absence. "I stepped into a studio with the boys in South London, and after a count of three we started up and the sparks were flying. It was as if I had just gone out for a packet of smokes, instead of being gone for 12 years! It was really good. To have Malcolm and Angus really enjoy the way you make their songs feel is quite a compliment, because they've got incredibly high standards. They really do have an unerring sense of direction about the way they want their music to go.

"You can hear that on *Stiff Upper Lip*. Drumming-wise it's minimalist, but it's the best thing I've done in a long time. It's a style that inspires the band and they don't give a s\*\*\* about anything else. We're all having a good time and really enjoying ourselves on the road. It's more fun now, even more than it used to be. There are no questions any more – you just go to work and do your thing. We've got a good set-up, a good show and a good crew. Do we behave ourselves on the road? Yeah! We're fairly old now, so we have to save our energy for the show, ha ha!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

AC/DC

### CLASSIC CUTS:

AC/DC *Let There Be Rock* (1977), AC/DC *Highway To*

*Hell* (1979), AC/DC *Back In Black* (1980), AC/DC *For Those About To Rock (We Salute You)* (1981), AC/DC *Stiff Upper Lip* (2000)





# Ringo Starr

The world's most famous and most universally-loved drummer, Ringo's playing, style and humour have influenced pretty much every drummer to pick up sticks in the last 50 years

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS/RHYTHM

**R**ingo Starr is the most famous and the most controversial drummer in history. The Beatles literally changed the lives of a generation, and Ringo certainly had a major part in shaping my life. Like thousands of others, I had only a mild interest in the drums when I first heard The Beatles. I played the piano, but Ringo put a hold on that. Yes, Mr Starr, I blame you for the unhealthy and overwhelming passion I've had for the tubs ever since. And I've also spent my adult life defending you at parties against people who rate The Beatles as the greatest pop group ever and yet still can't resist a smirk when it comes to your drumming prowess.

For these dolts, The Beatles were the classic case of three musicians and a drummer. And to them I'd say, you love those records? Well, Ringo's on them too, and don't tell me the drums on a rock record aren't important. This was always the rationalism that buoyed

appreciation for the real role of the drummer. If he wasn't playing fancy rolls all over the place like Buddy Rich, what good was he? And then, within a year or two of Ringo we had Baker, Mitchell and Bonham. By the late '60s the most technically gifted players were also rock stars on the front cover of *Melody Maker*. It's little wonder Ringo was branded a basher who got lucky.

But this misses the whole point of Ringo and The Beatles. They were always about great songs. You don't judge Lennon and McCartney's melodies by the number of notes they manage to squeeze into each bar. And this is not the way to assess Ringo's drumming either. Ringo stripped away the bulls\*\*t in drumming, revealing a mature style where what you leave out is as important as what you put in.

Of course this made it look easy and fuelled the notion that anyone could have done his job. But right from the beginning every track contained deft little

Rory Storm's Hurricanes shared the bill in Hamburg where they would alternate, one hour on, one off, for 12 hours, kept going on a cocktail of youthful energy, alcohol and Preludin pep pills. As Ringo says, "That's a hell of a long time, especially when in each set we were trying to top them - and they were trying to top us."

Increasingly, Ringo would hang out with The Beatles, who, though raw, had something special. "I just loved the way they played. I loved the songs, the attitude was great. I knew they were a better band than the one I was in." He got to sit in with them and it felt good - to him and to them. It was George who conspired most to get Ringo in. He says, "To me it was apparent: Pete kept being sick and not showing up for gigs, so we would get Ringo to sit in instead. And every time Ringo sat in, it seemed like 'this is it'."

For the time and for The Beatles, Pete Best was a good drummer. In fairness, The Beatles became Liverpool's top group before Best was sacked. But he never quite fitted in and following their EMI recording test in 1962 The Beatles' future producer George Martin simply wouldn't sign the band with Pete on drums. Best was with The Beatles for two years and three days. Ringo first appeared officially with The Beatles at Birkenhead's Hulme Hall on 18 August 1962, soon after his 22nd birthday. Paul sums it up: "We really started to think we needed the greatest drummer in Liverpool, and the greatest drummer in our eyes was Ringo."

But what would George Martin think? Too much, surely, has been made about the fact that Martin booked a top London session drummer, Andy White, to cover for Ringo on the first proper recording session. Having only just met Ringo, Martin was taking no chances. It says a lot for Ringo's confidence, and competence, that he was well miffed at being relegated to shaking a tambourine, and insisted on playing kit on a second take of the tracks recorded on that first session. The result is that The Beatles' first single 'Love Me Do' exists in two versions. One version has Andy White on drums with Ringo on tambourine, while the other has Ringo on kit - minus the tambourine. The drum tracks are virtually indistinguishable.

'Love Me Do' reached Number 17 in the charts. The follow-up, 'Please Please Me', reached Number One in January 1963 and Beatlemania took off. Within two years The Beatles had four Number One albums and seven Number One singles in the UK alone.

It was a fantastic boost for Ringo when The Beatles hit America. In the home of showbiz it was actually the most unassuming and perhaps least glamorous Beatle who captured most headlines.

Ringo's appearance with The Beatles on Sunday 9 February 1964 on the USA's *Ed Sullivan Show* - before the biggest TV audience ever recorded at the time - electrified and inspired the next two generations of American drummers. The grinning Ringo's head-shaking, hi-hat sweeping bravado was galvanising. Here was drumming stripped to its naked function.

## PAUL: "WE STARTED TO THINK WE NEEDED THE GREATEST DRUMMER IN LIVERPOOL, AND THE GREATEST IN OUR EYES WAS RINGO"

me up when I considered the rose-tinted glasses through which I was surely viewing Ringo's efforts.

Then the mid-'90s Britpop boom revealed a whole new generation of Beatles-mad musos. I remember Oasis drummer Alan White emotionally describing to me how, when he was growing up, Ringo was his yardstick for taste and cool. Chops-heavy Americans like Gregg Bissonette and Kenny Aronoff came bearing transcriptions of the very Ringo beats I'd been banging on about for decades. We couldn't all be wrong.

Of course, drummers are routinely undervalued. And given that Ringo was stuck behind those great songs, it's not surprising people have had a blind-spot. Ringo was the funny-looking one The Beatles picked up at the last minute. Ringo himself was the first to admit he was lucky beyond his wildest dreams to meet up with the most talented musicians of his generation. But as John Lennon said, "Ringo was a star in his own right before we even met... his talents would have come out one way or the other... Whatever that spark is in Ringo we all know it but we can't put our finger on it."

That spark was apparent from the start. It was his droll humour and lively, friendly nature, as much as his drumming, that secured Ringo the Beatles gig. And it was his honest charm which disarmed the cynical American press. His drumming became almost a side issue. Growing up I soon learned - or so I thought - to play all Ringo's licks. I knew Ringo was no technical giant. But the fundamental mistake Ringo's detractors still make is to think of him as a mediocre drummer rather than an instinctively astute musician. Particularly back in the early '60s, the public and press had scant

touches. And as The Beatles became more experimental so too did the drumming. The trademark fills Ringo developed on later tracks - like the intro break in 'With A Little Help From My Friends' - are melodic hooks intrinsic to the composition. Ringo nuts can identify every Beatles song from the drum part.

### A STARR IS BORN

Ringo Starr was born Richard Starkey on 7 July 1940 at 9 Madryn Street, adjacent to Liverpool's bombed-out dockside area. His father, also Richard Starkey, was a baker who left Richie to be brought up by his mother Elsie Gleave when the boy was three. Starkey's childhood was marred by bouts of poor health and long hospitalisation. He suffered a burst appendix when he was six; when he was 13 he got pleurisy and TB and was in hospital for another year. While recuperating, he started to play drums. After leaving hospital, he never returned to school.

Richie's mum remarried and his step-dad Harry got Richie his first proper drum kit for £12. By 1957, Richie was gigging with his workmates as the Eddie Clayton Skiffle Group. In November 1959 Richie joined Rory Storm and the Hurricanes. Storm gave him his stage name of Ringo Starr - the rings reflecting his teddy boy image. The Hurricanes became Liverpool's top show band and Ringo's drumming started to take shape.

He was thus an established performer by the time he met John, Paul and George, along with the other Beatles, bassist Stu Sutcliffe and drummer Pete Best. They were at first a little wary of him, not to say impressed by his Ford Zephyr Zodiac. The Beatles and





Americans of all ages watched entranced - or horrified - by this phenomenon unlike anything they'd seen before. Musical coals-to-Newcastle - The Beatles had absorbed the best of American roots music, repackaged it with their Liverpool wit and wisdom, and thrown it back in a completely revitalised form.

Beatlemania went on continuously for three years. The Billboard American Hot 100 singles for 4 April 1964 had The Beatles occupying positions One, Two, Three, Four and Five. Up until 1966 The Beatles were constantly touring, recording or appearing on television. Touring soon became a nightmare - no one could hear them because of the screaming and the whole operation became dangerous. The photos show a lonely Ringo, 10ft up on his riser with the band's tiny Vox amps on the floor in front, playing to stadiums of 50,000 with no monitors and no close-miking. What could he have heard? How did he manage to play at all? "There was nothing else I could do through the numbers bar play the off-beat," he laments. "If I tried to do anything on the toms it was lost in the din."

As the group became more adventurous in the studio it was increasingly less feasible for them to play their material live anyway. Their last ever concert was at Candlestick Park in California on 29 August 1966. The Beatles were the first band to stop touring and concentrate on making records. Ringo's drumming was free to develop in totally unforeseen directions.

## RINGO ON RECORD

The first two Beatles albums, *Please Please Me* and *With The Beatles* had been recorded live to two-track and released in mono. If there was any nervousness, it didn't come from Ringo. He knows exactly what to play and lays it right down the line. A pointer to more experimental grooves ahead is Ringo's occasional use of sparse, ride-less rhythms: 'Anna' has hi-hat on '3-&', a bizarrely catchy beat stumbled upon as Ringo tried (unsuccessfully) to copy the Arthur Alexander original.

Ringo's deeply laid-back groove seemed to settle the band for 1964's *A Hard Day's Night*, giving great songs the perfect platform. 'I Should Have Known Better', with Ringo's sweeping hi-hat and perfectly placed backbeat, is a typical example of Ringo's restraint and unerring beat - in-the-pocket playing as good as anything ever recorded. One area where Ringo's technique was quite advanced was in his use of rapid unisons on the snare and tom for a thicker-sounding fill. Because of his partial left-handedness he could play two hand unisons very quickly and tightly (not so easy for us righties).

The Beatles began to revolutionise the art of recording with the album *Revolver*. Here, Ringo's drumming gets more adventurous. 'Tomorrow Never Knows' has a killer beat, simple and insistent, the rimshot toms hanging in the air emphasising the mystical lyric. *Sergeant Pepper's* and the double A-side single 'Strawberry Fields/Penny Lane' contain The Beatles' most avant garde music. Ringo's dramatic fills tumble throughout 'Strawberry Fields', every one different and every one a winner - Ringo at his most inventive and slippery. The Beatles were getting tetchy by the time of 'The White Album', and Ringo, feeling the least secure, briefly fled the band thinking he was the problem. As a result, Paul played drums on 'Back In The USSR'. The band reassured Ringo that he was the greatest and everyone played with renewed zest. Great drum tracks again and Ringo's first ever self-penned tune, 'Don't Pass Me By'.



The grand finale of side two of *Abbey Road* includes Ringo's 'drum solo'. Of course, it's not a typical drum solo - it's so melodically logical it's an immutable part of the composition. With The Beatles in obvious disarray by the time of 1970's *Let It Be*, the album nevertheless includes the evergreen 'Get Back', with Ringo's pumping snare drum figure driving along in a nicely understated boogie.

## RINGOMANIA

By the time The Beatles broke up in 1970, Ringo had already begun a solo career. He had great success in the USA (seven Top 10 singles, including two Number Ones) and also scored four Top 10 hits in the UK between 1971 and 1974 ('It Don't Come Easy', 'Back Off Boogaloo', 'Photograph' and 'You're Sixteen'). He simultaneously pursued an acting career, appearing in films such as *That'll Be The Day*. Ringo had a great time mixing with the likes of Marlon Brando, Liz Taylor and Richard Burton. "I loved acting. And I loved meeting all those great actors and sitting around and hanging out. They all gave me tips," he said.

Since 1989, Ringo has toured, mostly in the USA, with various incarnations of his All-Starr Band. Ringo acts as genial MC and sings his hits, joined by various rock legends from Joe Walsh to Jack Bruce and fellow drummers like Jim Keltner, Free's Simon Kirke and even his son Zak Starkey.

In the mid-'90s there was a massive resurgence of interest in The Beatles thanks to the largely Beatles-influenced Britpop boom. EMI officially released many early Beatles tracks and Pete Best finally got a serious payday. In 2010, Ringo turned 70, and his All-Starr

band, with Gregg Bissonette on drums, arranged a special surprise at Radio City Music Hall, bringing his family and friends together - including Paul McCartney who, backed by the All-Stars, sang 'Birthday' to his friend and drummer.

Also that year, after years of wrangling between Apple and EMI, the Beatles' back catalogue was finally made available on iTunes, bringing Ringo and co's music to yet another generation. Meanwhile he continues to tour with the All-Stars and put out solo albums, his most recent and 16th studio album landing in January 2012.

Ringo's contribution is still massively under-appreciated of course, but within the drumming community at least there is a much greater willingness to shout openly about his special talent. And if we drummers can't assess his worth then who can? Let's give the man his due. Here's to you, Ringo, and your uniquely special place in drumming history. **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

**The Beatles, Ringo Starr**

**CLASSIC CUTS:** The

Beatles *With The Beatles*

(1963), *The Beatles A Hard*

*Day's Night* (1964), *The Beatles Revolver*

(1966), *The Beatles Sergeant Pepper's Lonely*

*Hearts Club Band* (1967), *The Beatles The*

*Beatles* (1968), *The Beatles Abbey Road* (1969)

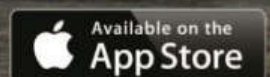


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# Rick Allen

As Def Leppard's classic album *Hysteria* celebrated a quarter-century since its release, *Rhythm* spoke to drummer Rick Allen about his own trials and triumphs

WORDS: RICH CHAMBERLAIN

**D**onington is a crossroads in my life," Rick Allen tells us. "That was where it all changed for me."

We are sat with the Def Leppard drummer, fittingly back at Donington, hours before their headline slot at [2011's] Download festival. The return marks 25 years since Rick's drumming rebirth at Donington's Monsters Of Rock, where he made his first major live appearance with the band since losing his left arm in a car crash 18 months earlier.

The 16 August, 1986 show, which saw Leppard below Ozzy Osbourne and The Scorpions on the bill, was a momentous and hugely daunting return to the stage. With only a smattering of club dates under his belt since the tragic accident, Rick was thrust back into the spotlight in front of tens-of-thousands of fans eager to see for themselves whether the headstrong drummer could really still power Def Leppard's energetic good-time rock.

As Rick recalls: "That was really scary. I didn't think I could pull it off. But to feel the warmth of a crowd like that, just feeling the sense that they wanted me to succeed and feeling that encouragement was just incredible. What a moment."

## THE COMEBACK KID

The return from the brink was made all the more incredible by the fact that, within a year, Rick's comeback culminated in Leppard releasing *Hysteria*, an album that would define their career, sell more than 20 million copies and spawn six hit singles - making them global megastars. As the band headed to Dublin to write and record what would become *Hysteria*, confidence was high thanks to the success of their 1983 breakthrough record *Pyromania*. Despite performing fairly modestly in the UK, the album was a smash hit Stateside, only being held off the Billboard Chart's Number One spot by Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.

That pressure to follow up the success of *Pyromania* was soon ramped up as the clock began ticking. In fact, the band had been working on the album for the best part of a year as the end of 1984 came into sight. Clues as to the almost endless process of writing and recording *Hysteria* first appeared as Leppard's tried and trusted producer Mutt Lange announced he was in need of a break and unable to commit to the full record, leading Jim Steinman to step in.

"As you know it took years and years to make the damned thing and then me going through my trials and tribulations, it just set the whole thing back even further," Rick says. "I started laying down drum tracks for *Hysteria* and then, because we started out working with Jim Steinman, all the early stuff I laid down never got used. That was simply because Mutt came back in on the scene and we wrote a whole bunch of new songs and that was it. It was basically a new record."

Then, on 31 December, 1984 Rick's life changed forever. While on his way to a New Year's Eve party in

the band's native Sheffield, the then-21-year-old drummer lost control of his car and crashed into a field. The impact severed his left arm and as a result seemingly ended his career behind the kit.

But Rick didn't quite see it that way. Thanks to an intense recovery period and a ground-breaking Simmons kit which saw specially-designed foot pedals enable his left foot to take care of the tasks once fulfilled by his left arm, Rick returned to the studio to continue working on *Hysteria*, joining Lange who had come back out of exile. The size of the job ahead was not lost on him.

He tells us: "As you can imagine, for me it felt like a huge task at that moment in time. I guess I felt somewhat overwhelmed at the prospect of having to do all of these songs." The mammoth undertaking was made all the more daunting by the new, painstaking process of laying down drum tracks that Rick was having to come to terms with, as each song needed several takes to nail the complex hybrid of acoustic kit, cymbals and electronics.

"What we did was we kept a lot of the drum machine parts and I went in and overdubbed real kit and also overdubbed cymbals," he explains. "I was able to play drum part, play cymbal part and then piece the things together, which helped; then using a lot of the drum machine stuff underneath it and it actually sounded really good. It was pretty unique sounding because the drums are so in your face. But you can hear it's a hybrid of electronic and real samples. It's a process of using acoustic drums to figure out what I want to do and then being able to do everything at the same time. It's a little tricky. It's like using different parts of your brain all the time. From figuring it out on acoustic drums to figuring it out in terms of where to stick it in the sampler."

"In a way it was fortunate that the record took so long to make because it gave me the time to integrate everything that had happened to me and get my head around it and how I was going to pull it off in a live setting. It was nice that I had a good year before I had to go out and play."

## RECORDING HYSTERIA

With the notoriously demanding Lange pushing the band to their limits, it began to feel like a never-ending studio session as the months, and even years, ticked by with *Hysteria* still not yet in the can. Rick admits: "I walked in the studio sometimes and Joe [Elliott, Def Leppard frontman] would almost be in tears thinking he couldn't do it - well, not the way Mutt wanted him to do it. We all felt that way. You felt inadequate because you weren't sure if you could deliver what Mutt was asking you to deliver."

But the band pulled through, somehow knowing that they were on the cusp of creating an album that would go on to be regarded as a rock classic and propel them to legendary status.

"We all knew we had something special," Rick says.

"Everybody felt really good about it but we'd spent so much damned money making the record that we were a little bit afraid we weren't going to be able to recoup the money that we'd spent on recording. It was crazy. We had to sell some ridiculous amount of records just to break even. It actually stalled out in terms of sales. Then I think it was when 'Pour Some Sugar On Me' came out, I think that really kick-started the whole thing and it went on to sell gazillions of copies. We were very fortunate. If you make quality, people will eventually get it and I think that's what happened with *Hysteria* and that's why it became a classic record."

The album finally dropped on 3 August, 1987, a year after Rick's return to the stage at Monsters Of Rock 1986. Propelled by smash singles 'Pour Some Sugar On Me', 'Rocket', 'Love Bites', 'Animal' and the title track, the record defined not only the band's career, but also their never-say-die attitude and proved just what can be achieved in even the toughest circumstances.

"It was a moment in time," says Rick. "We were still using analogue tape, it was before Pro-Tools, so what an undertaking. You listen to *Hysteria* and think that was why they invented Pro-Tools. Because we were on the verge of just pushing everything to its Nth degree, we couldn't do anything more with the equipment we had and the next step was digital recording. Not long after *Hysteria* you started to see the early digital recording, or at least recording that way was more available to more people."

## TRIUMPH OVER ADVERSITY

Rick considers the immeasurable impact the record has had on him, not only musically but also personally across the four decades since its release.

"It changed everything for me," he admits. "That whole period of my life changed everything. I love *Hysteria*. I sit up there playing the song 'Hysteria' and I always tear up. It's such an amazing journey and life that I've chosen for myself. I always feel grateful."

Ultimately, despite all of the pain and darkness that preceded and accompanied the album, *Hysteria* remains a perfect lesson in triumph over adversity. Rick concludes: "That whole album conjures up the gratitude and the hardships we all go through in life, the ups and downs. But ultimately to succeed with that gratitude in your heart. That record leaves me in a really good place. It's like, 'Everything is okay exactly where it is - don't move anything, it's fine.'" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Def Leppard

### CLASSIC CUTS: Def

Leppard *Pyromania* (1983),

Def Leppard *Hysteria* (1986)







# John Bradbury

John Bradbury brought his love of reggae beats and Northern Soul plus a truly unique kit sound to West Midlands ska-punk pioneers The Specials

WORDS: CHRIS BURKE

**M**ixing Jamaican reggae and ska beats, traditional Midlands pub-piano knees-ups and Clash-style punk, The Specials encapsulated the cultural melting pot and urban unrest of late '70s and early-'80s Britain.

Their single 'Ghost Town' topped the charts as inner-city areas of the UK burned in the 1981 riots. Other songs like 'Gangsters', 'Too Much Too Young', 'Do Nothing', 'A Message To You Rudy', 'Rat Race' and 'Man At C&A' captured the hearts and minds of not just that generation but – despite a hiatus of nearly 30 years – generations of new fans ever since.

The band fragmented after just two albums – *Specials* (1979) and *More Specials* (1980) – into chart-toppers Funboy Three and Special AKA, with whom Bradbury wrote the monumental, Apartheid-killing protest anthem 'Free Nelson Mandela'. In the mid-'80s, Brad would lead his own band, JB's All Stars, indulging his love of Northern Soul. In 2008 Brad and The Specials made their most complete reformation – all but Jerry Dammers – and continue to tour.

## What can you tell us about your first kit?

"I came to drumming by the age of about 13 or 14. I had great parents, a great upbringing, but money wasn't exactly flowing in Coventry at the time. So the first kit I had was a cobbled-together kit, it was a Stratford-Besson and a Pearl snare drum. It had a couple of old cymbals I don't even know the name of."

## What were your big drum influences?

"From about 14 onwards, in about '67 or '68, there was Motown and a lot of soul music coming from America. I was very much into Northern Soul, which was brought in by UK DJs, but my main influences came about in the early- to mid-'70s with reggae – which for some reason I loved more than any other kind of rhythm. I loved the third-beat drop in reggae and I liked the Steppers, the four-on-the-floor style of reggae playing, with the emphasis on hi-hat work and production effects."

## When did you first join The Specials?

"I was working in a record shop in Coventry at the time. They'd been around as the Coventry Automatics, and it wasn't really going anywhere. When The Specials came about, they were talking about doing a first single, which was 'Gangsters', and I went on board to do that. And I think my sound probably changed it a lot as well – it was rock with a bit of an outrageous kit sound."

## How did your distinctive sound come about?

"The drum sound came about from this cobbled-together kit I had originally. Although I played keyboard and a bit of Vibraphone, my main enjoyment on stage was the drums. And I think anybody in any band would find the drums the most enjoyable thing to play. A mate of mine at the time worked in a wood-turning factory

and I remember him giving me this shell, I believe it was 16"x16" and it was just a bare plywood, three- or four-ply shell, which I then proceeded to cut not quite in half, so it worked out about 7" and 9", and I took the top and bottom skins off the floor tom and created these wonderful two 16", timbale-looking things that had a ridiculously deep, boomy tom sound. That's what you hear on the first album, which is why, when you hear 'Too Hot' and 'It Doesn't Make It Alright' you can hear this particularly high-pitched snare sound; then with the snare-off a boomy tone to it. I liked those really over-the-top sounds. You could get those from a really cheap and nasty kit, no problem!"

## How much of an influence did punk rock have?

"The rock influences at the time were coming from progressive rock, but I did like Mitch Mitchell and obviously a big influence was Keith Moon, because Keith's frenetic playing was a model for a lot of people and his not necessarily playing the same thing twice was very important to me. If you have that opportunity to change with a framework I think it's really important. I do it with The Specials. We have the opportunity to do some slightly frenetic parts; in some of our breakdowns where we go into the reggae style I get the opportunity to move around, which keeps you alive and active."

## How much has your drumming evolved?

"It hasn't. What I'm calling it now is 'attack drumming' because I feel like I have to attack [the drums]. One thing that Rico Rodriguez [*Specials* trombonist] taught me when I was in his band was a lot about timing and empathy with the band leader. That's why we'd call him The General. He'd stop me doing too much, but then he'd say 'bust the drum kit' – hit the drums with all the power you've got. My dynamics tend to be off of a certain high rather than starting off low."

## Your appearance on *Saturday Night Live* on US TV performing 'Gangsters' was a pivotal point for the band internationally. It's an electric, and tense, performance.

"It was weird, though, 'cos we went across to America not knowing what to expect because they have a slightly different socio-political set-up over there, and the lyrics for the songs might be germane in the UK but not so much in the States. They were more into the knees-up style of thing. So consequently you got a fast, knees-up 'Gangsters' on *Saturday Night Live*. But America was a different ball game."

## Is it fair to say there was some tension within the band on your first trip there?

"Yeah. Americans like their stars to be stars. But we took this attitude to America – or some of us did – whereby we didn't want to be seen as rock stars, we wanted to be seen as normal blokes on the street. They couldn't quite get their heads around that. So one or

two incidents occurred whereby I think the Americans went, 'Well, they don't seem to be into this as much as we are, so we may not get behind them quite as much.' We held dear to our principles, but our principles perhaps weren't quite what was expected of us."

## When it came to *More Specials*, there seemed to be less actual drumming...

"The second album was difficult for me because it was starting to introduce this Yamaha home organ percussion sound. And, although I could see where it was going, I was more into 'Sock It To 'Em JB' – I was more into Rex Garvin And The Mighty Cravers than I was into lounge music. So I went along with what was going on at the time, but I didn't see much future in that as far as I was concerned. And as it turned out I was right, because what happened was we all decided it wasn't going in the right direction."

## Then 'Ghost Town' was a huge hit.

"I personally am not a big fan of what I did on 'Ghost Town'. I'd have liked it to have been a harder production, and I'm going against millions of people's attitudes in saying that! But I'm being honest. I've had the opportunity to change it slightly now we've come back, my own version of how it should be. I do less!"

## Special AKA made a huge impact on world politics with 'Free Nelson Mandela'...

"I was frightened that 'Free Nelson Mandela' would have a backing track that was somewhere in the region of 7/8, 5/4, whatever. But I felt that given its African connotations it should have a highlife backbeat, and I think that suggestion was one that was carried through at my insistence. I do believe that the message was delivered through music as much as anything else."

## What has been the band's enduring appeal?

"Its down-to-earth-ness, its lyrics, its strange but bewitching music, its cacophony. When you come to one of our concerts you realise how much they own of us. And how much we are part of them. And every time they put a record on they realise we're not a digital noise, we are human beings. And going to the concerts or playing our records, even 27 years later you still feel like you know each other. It is enduring, that!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Specials, Special AKA, JB's All Stars

### CLASSIC CUTS:

The Specials *The Specials* (1979), The Specials *More Specials* (1980), Special AKA *In The Studio* (1984)





# Richie Hayward

When Southern rock legends Little Feat played the UK in 2009, *Rhythm* conducted what was sadly to be one of the last ever interviews with their inspirational drummer Richie Hayward

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**L**ittle Feat was formed by ex-Mothers Of Invention vocalist/guitarist Lowell George, keyboard virtuoso Bill Payne and drummer Richie Hayward in 1969. It became, for many, the definitive American rock band of the 1970s. Jimmy Page, for example, declared them to be his favourite American group. Overflowing with talent in every department, Little Feat played a sweaty mix of country, blues, jazz, rock, boogie and Louisiana-inflected funk. Richie was a spellbinding drummer with an enormous passion for music of all kinds. His bustling style was based on a slippery right foot and non-stop left hand with which he could shuffle all night at any tempo. His high vocal harmonies were also a distinctive feature of the group's sound.

Despite wowing musicians and critics alike, the 'Feat never quite gained the commercial success they deserved. Leader Lowell George's unmistakable voice, slide guitar and witty, sardonic yet heartfelt songwriting elevated the band way above their contemporaries. Unfortunately, George's rock'n'roll lifestyle led to his diminishing influence and the band's temporary dissolution in 1978. He died the following year during a solo tour. Cut adrift, Richie found himself in demand for sessions. His feel, drive and invention were recognised by Robert Plant and Eric Clapton, who both got him over to the UK to play. Richie also worked with Ry Cooder, Robert Palmer, Joan Armatrading, Bonnie Raitt, Taj Mahal, Tom Waits, John Cale, Arlo Guthrie, Bob Dylan and many others.

In 1988 the band regrouped and continued with the classic core line-up unchanged until Richie's passing in 2010. *Rhythm* was present at the Oxford O2 on 10 May 2009 for a typical Feat gig – a masterclass in American music. Earlier, Richie had talked *Rhythm* through some of the recorded highlights of his long career.

**Richie, your most famous album, that defines the band, is probably *Dixie Chicken* (1973).**

"That was when we really found ourselves. We'd just changed the personnel before that and Paul [Barrere, guitar/vocals], Kenny [Gradney, bass] and Sam [Clayton, percussion/vocals] had come aboard. That changed the mix and opened up the sound quite a lot and we were just starting to find out how we played together. It felt like we were doing something new. And the songs were exceptional: 'Fat Man (In The Bath Tub)' is one of my all-time favourite Feat songs. And it was the beginning of that damn 'Chicken' song! We can't get through a show without having to play it, 40 years later! It's a good song, though. It was the record that made us."

**That elusive third album syndrome: it nearly finished the band before you'd started.**

"Well around this time there were tensions in the band. There was a lot of stress around *Dixie Chicken*, personality-wise, because we were doing a lot of 'pharmacology' that was not necessarily prescribed!

And it kind of got difficult. I left the band for about six months after *Dixie Chicken* – they wanted someone to play simply. But the end product came out really good. I'm really proud of that record. 'Lafayette Railroad' is a nice sweet, laid-back, quiet late-night kind of sound. It's kind of intimate and I like it for that reason. The quiet in between the storms!"

**Over here that whole spacious, funky New Orleans groove was a revelation. How did that come about, you being an LA band?**

"Well, we heard it and it's infectious and it definitely infected me and still does. How can complicated things sound so relaxing and natural?"

***Feats Don't Fail Me Now* (1974) took those rhythms further, with 'Rock'n'Roll Doctor'.**

"That one came out really cool. It was hard to play though at first. I had trouble keeping the tempo down. That has always been one of my demons. And it was particularly evident in that song."

**No one guessed at the time!**

"Well, fooled 'em again, heh? 'Down The Road' is one of my favourite grooves and we finally successfully got 'The Fan' on record. We'd tried that for two or three records before. It's one of the most difficult pieces I've ever had to learn and we finally nailed it."

**The band was getting trickier.**

"We were always kinda trying to be tricky and that was the quintessential tricky Feat song. There's only a couple of measures of 4/4 in it. The rest of it is in 7/8, nines and fives. It shifted around a lot."

**And then you finish off with the big medley of 'Cold, Cold, Cold' and 'Tripe Face Boogie' with that amazing climactic slide guitar note.**

"Yeah, with the pick-up. We still do it occasionally, after the damn Chicken song!"

**Next came *The Last Record Album* (1975) and *Time Loves A Hero* (1977). Some criticised the band for getting too much into jazz-fusion.**

"That influence was pretty strong with us then. There was a lot of great fusion coming out. 'Day At The Dog Races' leaves some people cold and some people love it. It's one of those polarising tracks."

**People moan about the band straying too far from its (Lowell) roots.**

"Yes, but our roots were music. If you listen to any of the records there are all kinds of different styles. That's just the way we always were, listening. People tend to want to put you in a pigeon hole, so you're branded and if you do anything else you're betraying your roots. But we always tried to keep that door open so we could do anything we wanted. And Lowell was writing less at that

point so Paul and Bill started to come to the fore a bit more to fill the gap because there simply were not that many Lowell songs. And the rhythm section just wanted to play – we were down for anything."

***Waiting For Columbus* (1978) is one of the all-time great live albums.**

"It was recorded over three nights in 1977 in London, and one night in Washington DC. That was pretty much an example of where we were coming from at the time. We had done songs and jammed together for a long time. We got to stick it to 'em!"

**The band was at a peak...**

"Yeah, for our career with Lowell, that was the peak. We were kicking on all cylinders most of the time. After that he died. A crying shame – you never get over it. 'Day Or Night' was really pushing it for me. It came off well that night, a sense of accomplishment. The 'Chicken' song sounds good, the Tower Of Power horns were great to work with, they're just a powerhouse. And English audiences were great."

**They still are, I hope...**

"The audiences are still good, but most of those places outside of London are just echo boxes – those city halls, like that horrible place in Wolverhampton [laughs]! If you went down there now you could probably still hear the last couple of songs."

**You lived near Wolverhampton for a while?**

"I lived in the Black Country, outside of Kidderminster when I was working with Robert Plant. I loved the people, I love England. I could live in the English countryside with no qualms, it's a wonderful place."

**You were there recording *Shaken And Stirred* (1985) with Robert Plant?**

"I got this call from Robert out of the blue. It was a whole new experience, another world, an English band. Robert was completely different from Lowell and Paul and those guys, a different way of working. I really took to it all. It was completely different from anything I'd done before. It was the early '80s when everything was trying to be modern, whatever that is. He gave me what turned out to be the most room I've ever got. It turns out that Zeppelin were a big Feat band. Made my day when I found that out." 

## ESSENTIALS



*Dixie Chicken* (1973)

### RELATED ARTISTS:

Little Feat, Robert Plant

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Little Feat *Feats Don't Fail Me Now* (1974), Little Feat





# Steven Adler & Matt Sorum

The men behind the kit for the *Appetite For Destruction* and *Use Your Illusion* albums reveal all about their part in the biggest chapters of the Guns N' Roses story

WORDS: RICH CHAMBERLAIN

**M**y whole life changed in one afternoon at A&M records," Steven Adler tells us, a pained expression etched across his face. That one afternoon, 11 July 1990, saw the drummer ousted from the band that he had helped turn into stadium-filling mega heroes – Guns N' Roses. Having enjoyed monumental success with their *Appetite For Destruction* debut album, the band had eyes only for world domination and as Adler's wild lifestyle began to interfere with their ambitious plans he found himself turfed out, replaced by The Cult's drum powerhouse Matt Sorum.

It was a bitter pill for Adler to swallow. The drummer had co-founded the band back in 1986 and oversaw their rise to the top from behind the kit, his punk-influenced rock chops the perfect foundation for GN'R's gritty take on flamboyant rock.

Guns may not have fully formed until '85, but their journey began back in the late '70s at Bancroft Junior High when budding drummer Adler met Saul Hudson, later to become known as top-hatted axe-man Slash.

Adler explains: "Putting a band together was something me and Slash had wanted to do since we were 11 or 12. We ran into three other guys who wanted to do the same thing. We all had the same goal and desire and the same direction and the same dream."

The drummer had spotted a banshee-voiced frontman and charismatic guitarist playing in fast-rising LA band Hollywood Rose, and Axl Rose and Izzy

opportunity and we didn't know if we'd get a second opportunity so we went in and took it for everything it was worth and made the best of it."

## APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

Adler and co headed to California's Rumbo Studios where they would make a record that would not only change their lives, but also change the landscape of rock music – *Appetite For Destruction*.

"I told [producer Mike Clink] I wanted my bass drum to sound like a cannon and my snare to sound like a machine gun, do your best. And he did. It was punk and jazz rock. I think the main thing that I brought to the band though is cowbell! I laugh about that but it's true. Beside the grooves, of course. On *Appetite*... I listen back to it now and I go, 'Wow, I stole that from this band or this drummer, subconsciously.' I'm very influenced by jazz drummers. I always liked drummers like Roger Taylor, Keith Moon, Ian Paice, John Densmore. I just learned from playing to those drummers. I feel like I brought a little bit of that rock'n'roll jazz to basic rock'n'roll."

Propelled by monster singles 'Welcome To The Jungle', 'Paradise City' and 'Sweet Child O' Mine', the record soared up the charts and Guns headed out on what would become a two-and-a-half year tour. The jaunt saw them start out as openers for The Cult but it wasn't long before they were packing arenas and stadiums under their own steam. For a bunch of

hanging out with the crew guys. Then the crew guys, if they were seen hanging out with me they would get a reprimand. It was terrible."

Things failed to improve once the band came off the road. With Adler's partying showing little sign of letting up, relationships became ever more strained. The situation reached its tipping point as they headed back to the studio to record what would become the *Use Your Illusion* albums. As Adler struggled to nail the track 'Civil War' his bandmates lost patience and he was quickly out in the cold and out of the band.

"I built up a family and I thought they had my back like I had theirs. So it was crushing for me when all of a sudden I was alone. I had nobody, it was hard. They say there is safety in numbers and all of a sudden those numbers threw me out. I thought, 'What did I do?' It was hurtful. It was totally unexpected. It also p\*\*\*ed me off with those guys, I was doing drugs *with* them. They didn't give me a chance, it was just one afternoon, all of a sudden, 'You're out.' In eight hours my life changed."

## ENTER MATT SORUM

With Guns in need of a drummer, the call went out to Matt Sorum, enjoying a quickly-blossoming reputation as a hard-hitting groove machine with The Cult.

He explains: "I was going to just do the albums and Steven was going to come back and do the tour. Steven was going through a lot of personal stuff. I was temporarily there. But as time progressed, maybe a couple of weeks into the session Slash pulled me aside, and said it didn't look as if Steven was coming back and asked me if I'd like to join the band."

"Here I was in an already successful band that I was very happy with, but to be offered that gig at the time was the highest level you can imagine. If you compare it to what's out there now, I don't think there's anyone that can compare to that level."

The venues, and expectations, may have been far bigger, but there was plenty of common musical ground shared by The Cult and Guns, although the Gunners' punk feel did take some getting used to.

"The Cult was a straight-ahead rock'n'roll band. They were a little more behind the beat. But the groove was more Phil Rudd than punk rock. When I joined Guns N' Roses it was more of a punk rock attitude mixed with the rock'n'roll. My playing was not meat and potatoes but that kind of style, laying it right down the middle. It was a little more of a garage band with a loose feel to it. With Guns N' Roses it was more haphazard, Slash might be pulling away and I had to pull the reins in. I had a different feel to Steven. The thing about drummers is that we're all different."

With Sorum now part of the Guns gang, the studio beckoned with the band facing the daunting challenge of following-up *Appetite*... They tackled the task by putting the hard-edged sound that had made them superstars on ice.

"Axl wanted to create big rock. I think subconsciously

## "AXL GRABBED THE MIC AND WAS RUNNING UP AND DOWN THE WALLS SCREAMING. WE KNEW RIGHT THEN WHAT WE HAD"

Stradlin were quickly converted to Adler and Slash's cause, joining the newly recruited Duff McKagan to form a band that would go on to shift albums by the lorry-load and pack stadiums worldwide.

"It was magic from the first day," Adler recalls. "The first song we played in rehearsal was 'Shadow Of Your Love' and Axl showed up late. We were playing the song and right in the middle of the song Axl showed up and he grabbed the microphone and was running up and down the walls screaming. I thought, 'This is the greatest thing ever.' We knew right then what we had."

The fivesome quickly found a rough-and-ready rock sound that took cues from New York Dolls, Queen and Deep Purple and would go on to spawn genuine rock anthems. It was helped along by undoubted chemistry and musicianship, but Adler acknowledges it was fuelled by pure graft.

"We were just rehearsing and we'd work on everything. Me and Duff would rehearse just by ourselves on the rhythm parts. We really cared. When we went into the studio we knew that was our

fresh-faced youngsters experiencing the first tastes of fame and excess it was a dream come true, but it came at a price.

"All we wanted to do was make a record, go on the road, make out with lots of girls, do drugs and travel around the world," Adler smiles. "We did that. It was great. It's a shame it ended the way it did. A younger body can put up with more s\*\*t and we gave ourselves a lot. It was like going in the ring with Muhammad Ali for 10 years. They didn't have *Behind The Music* when we were growing up. All we would have was magazines and they were talking about partying, you didn't hear about when they were sick and they couldn't make a show or they were in hospital."

The drummer's partying brought him to his knees and threatened to derail the Guns N' Roses juggernaut, and Adler began to feel he was being left in the shadows by his bandmates.

"All of a sudden the family thing turned into little cliques. Duff and Slash would hang out, Izzy would disappear, Axl – god knows what he was doing. I was





he was thinking of the stadiums. He wanted to test the boundaries with songs like 'November Rain' and 'Coma', these epic numbers. I was surprised with the piano and everything. I thought I was going to join this rock band and here we are coming up with something very different to what I was used to hearing. But I saw the diversity in Axl's songwriting."

Big rock meant a big kit for Sorum. The huge rock tom sounds found on the likes of 'November Rain' and 'You Could Be Mine' demanded a set-up that could cope with sizeable punishment.

"On that album I used the Rock Tour Custom kit which was a medium-line Yamaha kit. They had these huge toms, they were like square sizes 12"x12", 13"x13", 14"x14" - big, big toms. You can hear that on the album, the tom sounds are huge."

*Use Your Illusion I* and *II* sold more than 1.4 million copies between them within a week and sent the band into a mammoth three-year stadium tour.

Sorum explains: "Those were the days when tours sold records. It wasn't about making money on the road like it is now. The more we toured the more records we sold. At one point three years into the tour Axl said, 'We're at 35 million albums sold. Let's keep going to hit 40 million.'"

The biggest rock band since Led Zeppelin they may have been, but Sorum wasn't getting carried away with his live set-up.

"I didn't really have a huge kit. I had a lot of cymbals but I used one rack and two floors. I had a pretty big riser. I remember saying, 'Well, whatever Tommy Lee's doing, I'm not going to do that!' All that flying around in the air. I just set up on a riser."

"We did Rock in Rio and had Judas Priest opening. The tour manager came backstage and asked if we could move our riser for Judas Priest. I said, 'Yeah, sure put your riser out there.' I go out there and Judas Priest

are doing 'Turbo Lover' and the next thing I know the drum riser's going 50ft up in the air with smoke coming out of it! I thought, 'Oh boy, how am I gonna follow that?!'"

Any worries that GN'R's devoted worldwide following wouldn't take to the band's new drummer was quickly dispelled. After all, they had little choice...

"I was welcomed right away. I never had anybody give me any s\*\*t. I've always told the fans that Guns N' Roses were very close to not being able to continue. If I hadn't come in at that point I don't know if they would have been able to continue. Obviously it imploded a few years later but it was ready to implode then. There was already tension in the camp."

### END OF THE ROAD

While that implosion held off while Guns were packing stadiums, tensions came to a head once they ended their gruelling worldwide jaunt.

"When we got off tour was when we got in trouble," Sorum sighs. "Axl's thing was to outdo the last thing and we'd just done a three-year tour in massive stadiums and done epic videos and there was a lot of pressure on us. Me and Slash wrote a bunch of songs and gave them to Axl and he didn't like them. Those songs turned into Slash's Snakepit. We recorded that album together."

"In retrospect that was probably the beginning of the end. We should have rallied as a band and figured out how to get the songs better instead of jumping out on our own. In Axl's defence he was probably right. We should have stuck together, it wasn't the time for solo records. You don't see Metallica running around doing solo records. Has Bono or the Edge made a solo record? No."

With cracks quickly appearing, Slash decided to tour his Snakepit album, although Sorum turned down the

offer to join him. "Axl said if I went on tour with Slash I'd be fired. So I said, 'Okay, I'll stay at home with you, Axl.' And that's what I did. Slash was gone for quite a long time. Me, Duff and Axl continued to write. Axl was getting pretty fired up about Slash and that's how that [Slash leaving the band] got started. Soon after that I left and then Duff left."

All of which ended Adler and Sorum's involvement with Guns N' Roses - until 2012's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame show saw the pair share the stage as the band were inducted into the hallowed hall.

Asked about the chances of an *Appetite/Ilusion* era reunion, Sorum says: "Why not? I'd have to talk about the situation because I like to be in bed by midnight, I don't want to go on stage at midnight! I get tired man, I don't know how Axl keeps that up!"

Adler is even more enthusiastic: "I would love more than anything to play the songs with the guys I wrote them with. One day maybe that'll happen. I throw prayers in every day. I wouldn't mind if we did do a reunion if Matt came up and played a couple of songs that he played on. I still think if we got together in one room there would be hugs, tears and making magic." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

**Steven Adler:** Guns N' Roses, Adler's Appetite; **Matt Sorum:** Guns N' Roses, The Cult, Velvet Revolver

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Steven Adler: Guns N' Roses *Appetite For Destruction* (1987); Matt Sorum: Guns N' Roses *Use Your Illusion I & II* (1991)

# Ian Paice

One of the UK's great pioneering rock drummers, a crucial mover in the birth of heavy rock and a major influence on latter-day rock drumming heroes

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**T**his year it's 40 years since the release of Deep Purple's definitive album *Machine Head*. The late '60s saw Purple, alongside Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin, architect a monumental shift in the whole concept of rock, swiftly moving from blues to heavy rock and heavy metal, a style dominated by unforgettable riffs. And the most memorable guitar riff of all was the centrepiece of *Machine Head*, 'Smoke On The Water'.

The classic line-up of Purple – vocalist Ian Gillan, guitarist Ritchie Blackmore, keyboardist Jon Lord, bassist Roger Glover and drummer Ian Paice – combined heavy rock with elements of classical, prog and vintage rock'n'roll swagger. After their initial success the band took a hiatus from 1976 to 1984 during which time Paice played sessions and was also a member of Whitesnake and Gary Moore's band.

Reuniting in 1984, the band is still going strong today, with a 2012 tour of Canada, Europe and Russia, featuring Steve Morse on guitar and Don Airey expertly filling the role of Jon Lord who had retired in 2002 and sadly passed away in 2012. Paice has been the only drummer throughout, known for his rapid snare drum fusillades, powerful left-leading bass drum foot and classic big band-style triplet fills.

## Tell us about those historic sessions...

"The first track we laid down – and the last to be finished – was 'Smoke On The Water', before we knew what it was going to be called. That was done in the ballroom of the Grand Hotel in Montreux, right by the lake. There was no sound-proofing and we were recording at night, a hell of a racket! We just got the track down before the cops broke in, we had roadies holding the door shut with them pounding on the door!

"The obvious memory is of the chaos when the Casino burned down. To précis, we were to record in the Casino which was closing for the winter. The last concert [4 December] was Frank Zappa and we went along to see the show and some guy took a flare gun into a place that was decked out like a Polynesian island with artificial palm trees and coconuts! He decided to shoot it into the ceiling which went up like a perfectly-built bonfire. Zappa was magnificent – he said nobody panic and then jumped through the window behind him! Within minutes it was an inferno, flames hundreds of feet in the air. Back at the hotel Roger [Glover] and Ian [Gillan] saw this pall of smoke drifting across Lake Geneva and I think it was Roger who said "smoke on the water". Ian wrote it down and by the time it was finished it was the last track."

## But now you couldn't record in the Casino?

"We had everything in place – the truck [the Stones' mobile studio], gear, roadies – but nowhere to record. Claude Nobs, who still runs the festival today, said there's a hotel nearby, shut for the season. The recording was so quick I really don't remember it.

Music was written before, but not the vocals – there's no way 'Smoke' could have been written unless the casino fire had happened."

## Was the album the band's peak?

"I think *In Rock* (1970) was more important because it cemented the direction. The most important thing *Machine Head* did was to introduce Deep Purple to the USA because *In Rock* didn't come out there. My favourite track rhythmically is 'Space Trucking', because of its solidity and simplicity, about the only time Ritchie played block Chuck Berry chords, four to the bar. 'Lazy' is one of those that was better a year down the road recorded live, when we got to know it. Sometimes in the studio you just don't know the piece well enough."

## You were in the vanguard of prog and heavy rock. Who influenced the band early on?

"Vanilla Fudge switched us all on. They were the first who said it doesn't have to be a three-minute single. We were all influenced by them. [Drummer] Carmine Appice not only had the sound, he had invention, swing and push and great musical guile. I took a lot from him, his syncopation and anticipation were just wonderful. There are lots of mixtures of different music and big intros on the first three Purple albums and it was all trying to do what the Fudge did. 'Hush' was a one-off, a big US hit and the first album did well because of it. 'Hush' is still a great track because it's a hooky pop tune with basically a great samba rhythm. The follow-up, 'Kentucky Woman', was not so big. And you know in the band you can't go further. The chemistry was never complete until Roger [Glover] and Ian [Gillan] joined and the true direction of the band came through. When we got the classic five together, what it became was the only way to go and it happened to be the right thing for us and for the public at the time."

## You personally made a name for yourself with tracks like 'Fireball' (1971), which is surely the progenitor of thrash-metal double kicks?

"It's not that what I did was particularly difficult, but it is musically perfect for the track. It pushes and pulls the verses and middle-eights and sets up little instrumental bits wonderfully well. It's one of those things as a kid where you're not thinking about what you can't do, you're thinking that is what I am going to do."

## You've been in the band since the beginning, do you still look forward to playing?

"Oh I do! Most times it's great fun. We have got touring sorted to a fine art and we all understand we are not 21 anymore and it would not be a good idea to go out and get rat-arsed seven days a week! You still have fun, but treat it with realism. We structure major tours so we can use a private aircraft and that alone allows everyone to get a good night's sleep, which keeps you fit."

## And even playing heavy, you've always kept that jazzy, swinging feel.

"I hear everything with a swing and even today I have more in common with the rock drummers of the '50s than even the '60s and '70s. My father was a very good piano player and his [jazz] stuff was always on the radio and I love that to this day, the subtleties of great jazz musicians and vocalists."

## That subtle swing was almost lost in the 1980s. Now everyone talks about it again.

"But there's no call for it. You name me the last hit record that had a shuffle or swing beat to it. Everything is smashing straight-eighths. Nothing wrong with that, but there is more. A shuffle beat is a heartbeat. That's why when you hear it played well there's nothing you can do except move to it, it's so primordial. When you hear Little Richard, Jerry Lee, Chuck Berry, Elvis – half of the rhythm section are swinging and half aren't, because they didn't know what to do. Because you played [jazz swing] while the piano played straight eighths. And that mixture, which shouldn't have worked, gives it that glorious feel. I still get more pleasure out of Chuck Berry than listening to what rock has become. I just find the rhythms more enticing and erotic, human, not machine-like... Just better."

## Purple seems to be as strong as ever?

"We can go on as long as we can physically do it. That will be the shutdown date, when I really can't do it a little bit better than the next guy. I don't want to go out with a whimper. There are things I could do easily at 21 I find difficult now because I have forgotten them. And there are things I can do now that I couldn't at 21 because I didn't know they existed."

## It's been a while since the last record.

"*Rapture Of The Deep*, which is now seven years old, has some nice drum moments. Sometimes we make life difficult for ourselves when we should be doing these things in the best studio possible. We get coerced into someone's home studio and you can get a job done, but it's not Abbey Road or Bearsville. The next one, which we start in July, will be in a fantastic old tracking room in Nashville, about the only place that still has studios where you can afford to do it now!"

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Deep Purple, Whitesnake

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Deep Purple *In Rock* (1970),

Deep Purple *Fireball* (1971),

Deep Purple *Machine Head* (1972), Deep

Purple *Live In Japan* (1972)





# Larry Mullen Jr

Once upon a time there was a little schoolboy punk band that came to be called U2, and go on to be one of the world's biggest rock bands. This is their drummer's story...

WORDS: MARK CUNNINGHAM

**T**hey may fill stadiums and enormo-domes the world over, but U2's sticksman Larry Mullen Jr can still recall those early days in 1976 when the fledgling band rehearsed in his parents' kitchen.

"We'd all had some form of interest in music, and there was about six or seven of us, plus a couple of friends, jamming away with no real direction. The idea was just to see who could or couldn't play, as normally happens with new bands. The thing that was most interesting about the meeting was Edge [*then Dave Evans*] and his brother Dick, who later played with The Virgin Prunes, had built their own very funky looking electric guitar, which didn't work very well, and that was my lasting memory of that first rehearsal. Everything else was borrowed or didn't work. It was pretty chaotic.

"But the following day, we figured out who was going to be in the band. It was really down to who had the loudest voice and the most money. I had saved up cash from mowing lawns to buy my first drum kit; Edge was able to build guitars and Adam already had a bass. But Bono was slightly in dire straits and we wanted him to play guitar, although he insisted on singing. Now we know why - he didn't have to buy any equipment! We were doing Stones songs and then some Stranglers tracks when they first broke. It was the beginning of punk and that's what was happening. Very early on we started to write our own material, albeit badly. It wasn't until much later, in 1978-79 that we had some idea of musical direction. The band had gone through a whole lot of changes and it wasn't a proper working band until '78 or '79 when we decided to make a go of it."

Growing up as a teenager in the mid-'70s, Larry's staple musical diet consisted of glam greats like The Sweet, T-Rex, Roxy Music, Slade and Gary Glitter, whose two-drummer band fascinated the Dublin lad.

"I just knew that this was something I wanted to do. If you listen back to a lot of music, as far as beat is concerned, it was so 'on' and rhythmic in a very simple way. I also loved Bowie - rhythmically he was so advanced, and that's why Ziggy Stardust and a lot of that '70s stuff still stands up today. Glam Rock was certainly the foundation of my influences and I used to take a pair of sticks and hit things along to the records."

## MARCHING TO THE BEAT

Larry's distinctive drumming style and sense of rhythm had their origins in his experiences as a young marching band drummer.

"I'm very interested in Irish traditional music and rhythm, and that's really where I come from. I have played in a lot of military-style bands and at some point I think it crossed over to U2. If you listen to the first three or four albums, I think you can spot the influence. One of the things I find when I listen back is that my playing was very simple, kind of inventive at times but at other times it didn't have a lot of rhythmic qualities.

"When you're playing with two guys like a bass

player and a guitarist, there are a lot of open spaces to fill. A good example was The Police, where they filled in those gaps in a quite sophisticated way in comparison to U2. We were rhythmically unsophisticated, and a lot of that came from the fact that I was playing in military bands where there were other people covering all those different areas. You had percussionists, another drummer and three or four bass instruments, and there was confusion over who exactly should be providing the beat.

"In military bands I was providing a form of rhythm but not necessarily the 4/4 beat, and it was only after we started work with Danny [*producer Daniel Lanois*] that I started to understand what the position of a drummer in the band was. I know it sounds strange, but we don't have a rock'n'roll tradition in Ireland, and when you're 15 or 16 and starting out in a band like I was, it was hard for a drummer to instinctively know what to do in that role. Do you provide a musical element or just a beat? It was a dilemma and I notice that now when I listen to some of our early records. I suppose it is the challenge for drummers to both provide the beat and be inventive, all at once. In traditional Irish music, when they play bodhrans, it's rarely on the 4/4, it's always on the off-beat and other instruments like spoons and bones provide 4/4. So I guess those things have had a huge influence on me."

Those influences don't come any stronger than on the U2 classics 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' and 'Pride (In The Name Of Love)', the latter exhibiting some of the most electrifying snare fills in rock history. "When it came to recording 'Pride', Danny was able to pick up from me that I had some interesting ideas but there was a slight lack of focus. My kick-drum technique was then, as it is now, completely under-developed and I never got the chance to practise and learn it like most people would. In the marching bands, I only used a snare, and when I first got a kit, I never learned how to properly use all the elements together.

So, I went in and listened to a basic demo of 'Pride', and tried to play a beat using just the kick and snare. But I couldn't get the kick to do what I wanted, so I got a floor tom down and did what I'd done in the past, which was if I couldn't physically do what was necessary, I'd find another way around it. I couldn't do what most people would consider normal for the song, so I chose alternatives. Those snare rolls were originally very straight, until Bono told me it didn't sound right. So I spent a couple of hours trying things out until I came up with the build-ups and accents you hear. If I'd had the knowledge, I would have done something completely different, but I don't think it would have been half as interesting. You give up something to get something else, and my drumming career has always been based on a complete lack of expertise!"

Despite Larry's self-criticism, there is no doubt that his unique approach is highly effective in the context of U2's music. Keen to improve his craft, Larry practises

whenever time permits. In fact, wherever he roams, a set of e-drums is on hand for the occasional honing of paradiddles and other rudiments. "I have some exercises that I go through, although I don't do it as often as possible. As I said, my kick drum technique leaves a lot to be desired, but the time comes when you think, 'Hey, I really want to be able to do this s\*\*t!' I won't stop doing all the other things, but it's getting a little bit too embarrassing now to ignore it."

## EMBRACING ELECTRONICS

For a real live drummer with an 'organic' approach it is surprising how warmly Larry has embraced experimentation with drum samples, loops and machines. Although this use of technology began to infiltrate the band's music as early as 1984 ('Bad') and progressed with spectacular effect on 'God Part 2' (*Rattle And Hum*), it was on *Achtung Baby* (1991) and *Zooropa* (1993) that it became an integral part of their sonic make-up. They are a band that continually push boundaries, but is there a danger of their obsession with unpredictability compromising the music?

"Musically, I think U2 is unpredictable but I don't think it's contrived, it's just a fact of life. We've never been proficient enough to be regular and have always worked in an ad hoc way, experimenting with different producers, and I don't think that will change. Surely it can only enhance the music and not take away from it? If you struggle to be different, then I think it's a bit of a waste of space. We just struggle to be inventive and on the cutting edge but if you are not naturally that way then what you do could be considered less than relevant. There are bands out there who are ripping off The Rolling Stones or whoever, and that's okay if you want to make it easy for yourself. But we always want to break new ground and push back the boundaries."

Finally, I ask Larry what it is that makes U2 so special: "It has nothing to do with the four individuals, but what happens when we get together and the music we make as a collective unit. The band's greatest strength is that there are no boundaries and no limits. You can't get any bigger or more famous and yet we have been able to achieve everything, for the most part, on our own terms. That's the most satisfying thing for us and I hope we will be able to continue that." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

U2

### CLASSIC CUTS:

U2 *Boy* (1980), U2

*War* (1983), U2 *The*

*Unforgettable Fire* (1984), U2 *The Joshua Tree*

(1987), U2 *Achtung Baby* (1991), U2 *All That*

*You Can't Leave Behind* (2000)





# Earl Palmer

Earl Palmer was the original rock'n'roll session drummer, the man who put the backbeat into rock and another who could lay claim to being possibly the most recorded drummer ever

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**N**ew Orleans in 1955: the cradle of jazz hosts sessions by Little Richard, the outrageous rock'n'roll discovery of LA's Specialty record label. Down at Cosimo Matassa's studio, a bunch of erstwhile jazz musicians are stirred to create pop history by Richard's riotous energy. Together they invent, if not the first, then certainly the most enduring rock'n'roll songs. 'Tutti Frutti', 'Long Tall Sally' and 'Lucille' encapsulate the untamed force that scared the pants off parents worldwide. The unlikely drummer behind these classics was Earl Palmer.

Unlikely, because Earl was a serious music student, a war veteran and a straight-up jazzier who, even late in life, couldn't quite reconcile himself with the fact that he'd invented rock'n'roll drumming. It took until 2000 for him to be inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, a belated recognition of the massive contribution of session men in the creation of popular music.

It's hard to appreciate now that there was a time when rock didn't exist – that someone had to invent it. Someone had to be first with the relentless two and four snare. That someone was Earl Palmer. Previously, commercial music had a swing beat or a shuffle. The New Orleans sound that had attracted Specialty to Matassa's tiny studio and led it to hire Palmer's so-called Studio Band was first heard on the late '40s hits of Fats Domino and Lloyd Price. Fats often played a loping 12/8 groove, while Price's 1952 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy' is an easy-going shuffle. By the time of Little Richard's first wild hit, 'Tutti Frutti' (1955), Earl's shuffle was much more hectic.

He later said he should have played it straighter, but Earl soon got the hang of it. By the following year's 'Lucille', Earl was knocking out straight-eighths hi-hat with a loud, unerring backbeat. Earl attributed this shift to the sheer physicality of Richard's playing. Previously, the in-your-face snare backbeat had been confined to the 'shout' chorus – the 'taking it home' outro of swing and Dixieland. Earl realised that this new, raw, rock'n'roll called for it all the way through.

Born in 1924 in the French-Creole Tremé suburb of New Orleans, Earl led an eventful life, so improbably action-packed and dangerously romantic that it's difficult for us modern softies to imagine. He was on the road with his mother, Thelma, tap dancing in black vaudeville from the age of four. Growing up, he, his mother and aunt joined the celebrated blues singer Ida Cox in the Darktown Scandals Review. Earl travelled all over the USA well into his teens, becoming an expert dancer and worldly-wise show business veteran.

## ARMY LIFE

In 1940, he joined the US military and served in World War II, where he quickly discovered that racism and segregation were not just facts of life in Louisiana – they were written into the army's constitution. He was demoted from sergeant for supplying live ammo to his fellow black soldiers so they could protect themselves

against their white 'compatriots', who'd take pot shots at them in training.

Earl came to England and saw combat in Europe. On returning home, Earl demobbed on 10 December, 1945 and the following week witnessed both Art Blakey and the great New Orleans drummer Vernel Fournier. It was enough to convince Earl of his future career.

With his existing vast experience of show business and dance, he quickly became an effective drummer – among the best in town. He simultaneously attended Grunewald's music school and majored in piano. Since he already played drums, his intention was to read well, compose and arrange.

Earl joined trumpeter Dave Bartholomew's leading r'n'b band in 1947 and started his recording career at Matassa's J&M Studio. There they created New Orleans rock'n'roll, starting with Fats Domino's 'The Fat Man' (1949). "Jazz is all we played until we made those records," Earl later commented. "The backbeat came about because the public wasn't buying jazz, so we put something in that was simpler and that's what made the difference."

Racial discrimination is a shameful recurring theme throughout Earl's story. New Orleans is routinely characterised as the melting pot that gave the world jazz and rock, but that melting pot was in fact a boiling cauldron. Earl had returned from Europe in 1945 to segregation laws that made it illegal for him to play with white musicians. And he risked a beating – or worse – if he was seen associating with his white, art student girlfriend, Susan Weidenpesch. Having travelled through 30 states as a child performer, he knew that California was more enlightened. Reluctantly leaving behind his first wife Catherine and his four children, he upped sticks for LA in 1957, taking Susan with him.

## SESSION MASTER

Previously underground 'race' music was taking off massively as white teenagers turned on to rock'n'roll and white-owned labels sought out savvy black musicians who understood the new sound. Earl was perfect – outgoing, skilled and hard working. He came out to LA as an A&R man for Aladdin Records, immediately producing and arranging Thurston Harris's big hit 'Little Bitty Pretty One'.

With rock storming the pop charts, time was money and the age of the expert rock session player took off. Moreover, the old Hollywood studio system, with its outdated staff orchestras, was due for a change. Earl was soon recording non-stop – an album a day. Almost immediately, he created rock history again with Ritchie Valens' 'La Bamba' (1958), as well as Eddie Cochran's 'Summertime Blues' (1958) and 'C'mon Everybody' (1959). His reputation soaring, it was apparent that Earl's range went way beyond simple rock tunes. Earl was the first black drummer accepted for what was considered 'higher class' work with mainstream artists as well as TV and movie dates.

Earl never kept full records of his recordings, so it's quite possible that he's the most recorded drummer ever. Here's just a taster of his credits: country and soul, including work with Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, the Everly Brothers, Sam Cooke and Ray Charles, plus innumerable sessions for Tamla Motown; mainstream music with Doris Day, Paul Anka, Bobby Vee and Connie Stevens; heavyweights like Dinah Washington, Nat 'King' Cole, Bobby Darin, Ray Charles and Frank Sinatra; and jazz with Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie and Cannonball Adderley.

Of the thousands of tracks, two of the most celebrated are the Phil Spector produced 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling' (the Righteous Brothers, 1964) and 'River Deep, Mountain High' (Ike and Tina Turner, 1966).

## LATE CAREER

As the '60s turned into the '70s, rock groups became more self-sufficient and Earl moved further into challenging TV and film work. His TV credits include *The Flintstones*, *M.A.S.H.*, *Mission: Impossible* and *The Brady Bunch*. Films include *Bullitt*, *In The Heat Of The Night*, *Cool Hand Luke*, *Top Gun* and *Zachariah* (for which Earl reproduced Elvin Jones's famous on-screen drum solo).

But Earl claimed his hardest sessions were for the Tom And Jerry cartoons. Nailing those rollercoaster arrangements with just one run-through was a superlative achievement. "Here I am playing music I used to be scared to listen to, let alone play," he later recalled.

The arrival of drum machines and computers in the 1980s signalled the decline of the mega-session world. As Earl's workload diminished, he became a union official, becoming secretary-treasurer of the Hollywood branch of the American Federation of Musicians in 1983. Throughout his entire career, Earl always found time to play jazz – his first love. Professionally, he was immensely proud of the fact that he, a poor, black kid from New Orleans, was accepted and valued in the most heavyweight of musical circles. Inevitably though, he'll go down in history for his unique contribution to rock. Earl was one of those rare, inspirational drummers who changed the way we all play. **R**

## ESSENTIALS

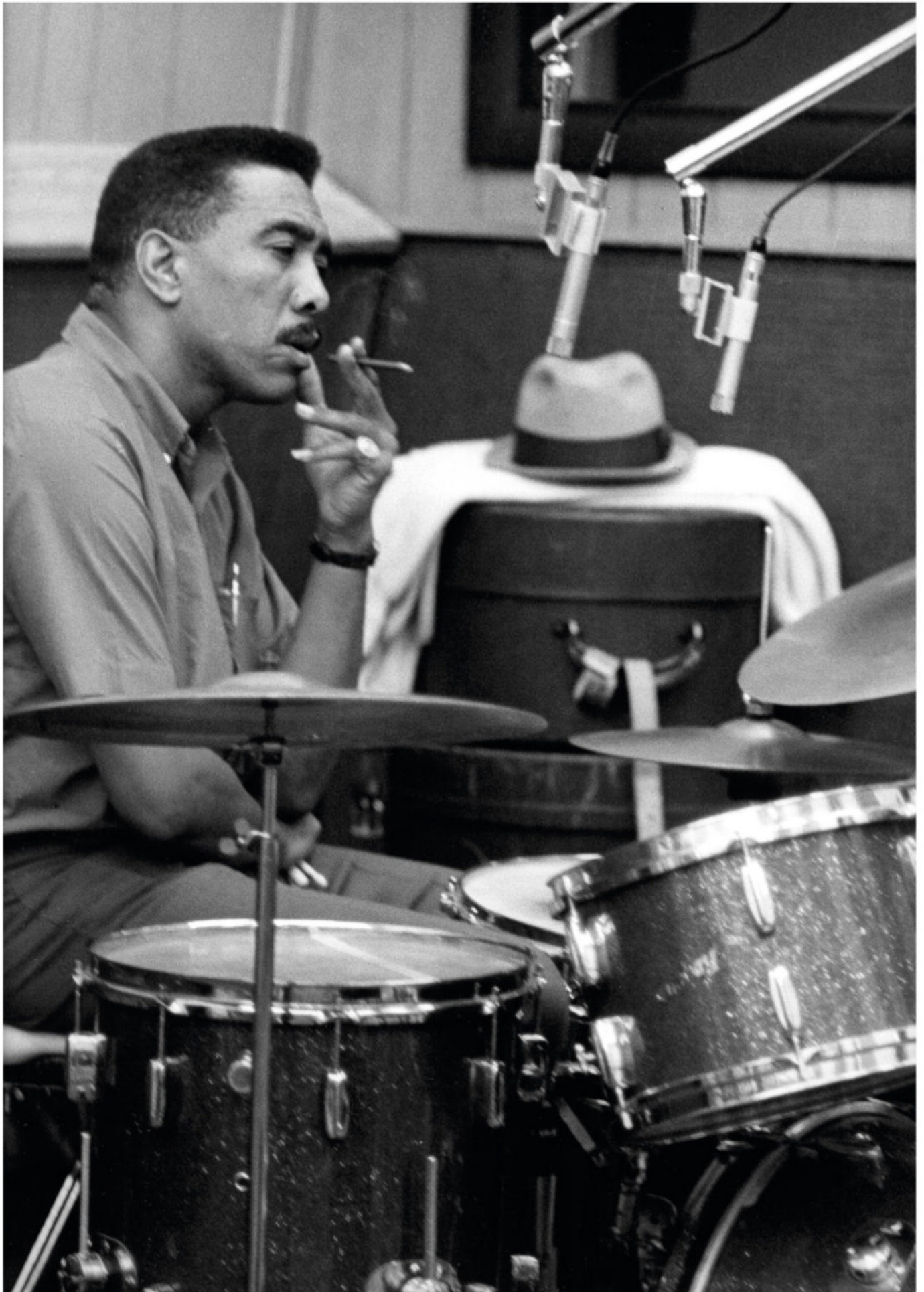


### RELATED ARTISTS:

Little Richard, Fats Domino, Ritchie Valens

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Little Richard *Here's Little Richard* (1957), Earl Palmer *Drumville* (1961), Lalo Schiffrin *Music From Mission: Impossible* (1967)





# Brann Dailor

Progressive metallers Mastodon make rhythmically complex music driven by the powerful single-stroke tom fills of drummer and lyricist Brann Dailor

WORDS: CHUCK PARKER

**M**astodon began leaving their mark on the hard rock world 10 years ago with the release of their first album *Remission*. Since then, they've continued to grow and develop their skills as a band by releasing a string of daring yet critically-acclaimed albums. The latest is *The Hunter*. It could very well be the album of their career. Chock-full of grooving, catchy songs, *The Hunter* maintains Mastodon's proggy style presented in shorter, concise cuts. One quarter of this musical equation is Brann Dailor. Brann not only handles the complex rhythmic duties of Mastodon but also writes lyrics, arranges songs and sings as well.

Hailing from Rochester, New York, the 36-year-old Brann grew up in a musical household and was exposed to a wide variety of music. Although not a schooled player with a formal background, Brann's musical exposure fuelled his desire to drum and shortly after relocating to Atlanta, Georgia, Brann formed Mastodon with guitarist Bill Kelliher, guitarist/vocalist Brent Hines and bassist/vocalist Troy Sanders.

*You've used the same set-up for years, is there a particular reason for that?*

"I guess I'm just a creature of habit. I get used to a set-up being a certain way. I know there's guys out there that will change it up from time to time to keep it interesting but I just really feel like I have a handle on the way my drums are set up. When I write music with the band, I use those configurations so much that if I was to put something else in, I don't know where I'd use it. I didn't write the song with it. I would have to change it before writing. I've always tried to keep it as simple as possible, but I can't seem to get rid of the three toms up-top. I like having three toms there. I had a bigger kit when I was 14 or 15 and when we went to play our first gig, I couldn't fit all the drums into one car, so I had to get hold of a truck to come over and pick up the rest of the drum kit and bring it to the gig. The set-up that I have now was out of necessity back then to be able to fit the drums into one car. That's why I got rid of the actual double bass that I used to have. I had a big Ludwig Rocker kit when I was 14. It was massive and wouldn't fit in one car, so I had to downsize."

*How do you prepare personally for the studio?*

"I play a lot of drums before we go in. I practise as much as I can and make sure that I'm familiar with all the material that we're going to do. We practise a lot. I go down to the practice space by myself and work on stuff if I have question marks as far as parts are concerned. I'll just be as healthy - mentally and physically - and as prepared for going in as possible."

*Did the band do extensive pre-production before you hit the studio?*

"That's how it usually is. This time around, it was a little bit different. This is the least prepared we've been to go

in the studio. But it was kind of cool. It opened up some improvisational moments that wouldn't have been there otherwise. We like for those things to happen. We had probably 90 percent of the material completely figured out and then there was a song that needed a bridge, and there were a couple of other loose songs that we weren't sure if they were even going to make the record at all - or if they were even going to become songs, because they were just a couple of riffs. Two other songs were missing pieces that either we needed to come up with in the studio, or re-address when we got back from tour. That was the idea going in, that we were going to do our best and see how far we got. When we got in there, everything ended up coming together really nicely as we were in there just tracking drums. We did all the drum tracks in about five days. We just worked really hard and things came together."

*When you are writing lyrics, where does your inspiration come from, and do your lyrics inspire certain drum parts - or is it the other way around?*

"I see the way a vocal pattern lies over the top of something as also having a percussive element to it. I try to pick a subject matter for lyric writing but it's hard because you want things to come to you naturally. You don't want to push for them to happen. I sit down with a song and listen to it over and over again and try to sing something over the top of it. Then I'll get some sounds going, like some phrasings going. Then I'll make those into lyrics. I'll say, 'I can get four syllables into this space.' That's how you have to write the lyrics. They have to fit in these little spaces. You have to shoehorn them in there. Then you have to try to make lines one and three rhyme and make lines two and four. It's really unorthodox but we make it work somehow."

*Is the writing a democratic process?*

"Everyone contributes. It happens a whole bunch of different ways. I could write something at home. Everyone writes a little bit of something at home. Or, we come in and we have one riff or two riffs. Someone else has a riff that goes with that one, something like that. I feel like it doesn't become a Mastodon song until everyone has some input on it. Everyone touches the song in a certain way. It does something different and it brings something different to the table to make it sound like us. If it's just one person by themselves, it doesn't sound like Mastodon to me. Everyone gets in there and contributes a little bit."

*Will the rest of the band tell you if you're overplaying, or is there a certain telepathy when it comes to knowing just where to take a song?*

"We have the telepathy thing going on. When we are in the room together playing new stuff or when we are

just starting to write it, it's definitely a telepathic communication. You look around and you're like, 'Yeah!' That's the exciting part. Probably one of the best parts of being in a band is coming up with that new thing that gets everybody excited."

*The songs on new album The Hunter are shorter and more compact. Was that an intentional thing to write shorter songs, or was it just the way that the writing process happened this time?*

"It's just the way it worked out. I guess it's sort of a knee-jerk reaction to *Crack The Skye*, which was really long songs with lots of stuff going on. We wanted to go the other way with it. But you can talk all day about what you want to do and then once you start writing, things just start happening. It takes on a life of its own. You have to trust it and follow it wherever it goes and hope for the best. There were a lot of weird, stressful situations happening with people in their lives outside of the band."

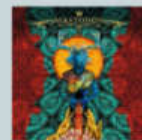
"Normally, for a Mastodon album, we usually make that a really stressful thing. We're in there everyday, all day long, banging our heads up against the wall to figure out how to shoehorn these mathematical equations into these songs and it gets pretty intense in there. Tempers flare occasionally and people have been known to walk out [laughs]!"

"All's fair I guess. We get together the next day and go, 'Okay, sorry.' That's like eight months of that going on usually, especially for [Mastodon's 2009 album] *Crack The Skye*. Trying to put together stuff like 'The Last Baron', which is a nightmare, to be honest. It was fun and when you're finally able to get through the whole song and it feels right and you can play it through for 14 minutes, it feels like you accomplished something."

"This time around, it was really imperative to make sure that the practice space was the one place that was stress-free. We could all go there and write music together and have it not be difficult or hard."

"I think that in the past, if we'd come up with a riff, or a series of riffs like in 'Curl Of The Burl', we would have said to ourselves, 'It's a little too simple. People expect more from us,' or something like that, but we went with gut reaction. We were satisfied with a simpler version of ourselves." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Lethargy, Mastodon

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Mastodon *Blood Mountain* (2006), Mastodon *Crack The Skye* (2011), Mastodon *The Hunter* (2011)





# Aynsley Dunbar

Jeff Beck, Frank Zappa, David Bowie, Jefferson Starship, Journey, Whitesnake... few drummers have played with a more diverse group of successful rock acts than Aynsley Dunbar

WORDS: CHUCK PARKER

**A**ynsley Dunbar may be best known for his work in progressive and hard rock, but he grew up involved in the Liverpool jazz scene. Born in Liverpool in 1946, Aynsley began playing drums at the age of 11. Besides his involvement in jazz, Aynsley was also part of the blossoming rock and R&B movement in Liverpool in 1963, playing for such groups as Derry Wilkie And The Pressmen, Freddie Starr And The Flamingos, The Excheckers and Stu James And The Mojos. Throughout the '60s, Aynsley played with Peter Green and John McVie in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and drummed in the Jeff Beck Group with Rod Stewart and Ron Wood. He also led his own group, The Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation in 1967 and later put together the progressive jam band, Blue Whale.

All of these musical experiences paid off when Frank Zappa asked Aynsley to move to America and join his new band. After playing and recording with Zappa in the early '70s, Aynsley continued his stellar track record playing and recording with David Bowie and Lou Reed. Then, seeking to join a rock fusion group, he became a member of Journey, recording and co-writing four albums, including the group's breakthrough release, *Infinity*. Aynsley continued his hit-making run into the 1980s with Jefferson Starship, playing on three of their releases and drumming on Whitesnake's hit self-titled album.

Throughout the 1990s, Aynsley continued his association with guitar-orientated rock, playing and recording with Pat Travers, UFO, John Lee Hooker and Michael Schenker. More recently he has continued to tour with The World Classic Rockers.

## Of all the projects you've done, what are you really proud of?

"One of the later things would be the *Whitesnake* album [1987]. That turned out really good."

## How did you get involved with David Bowie?

"When I was with Frank Zappa, Jim Pons, the bass player, loved David Bowie's music so he gave me tapes to listen to. I really enjoyed the pop songs Bowie was doing. I was recording the *Berlin* album with Lou Reed and had a day off. Bowie called me at the hotel in London and asked me if I would like to go to the show that night and sit in with Jeff Beck. I said, 'I'd love to, let me call Lou and see if he wants to come.' I called Lou and he immediately decided he was going to call a session that night. We went to the studio and spent four hours doing absolutely nothing! I told Lou, 'You better come with me to the party afterwards,' which I was invited to. Lou and Bowie weren't best of friends at that point and had a little bit of a problem. We sat down at the table and started laughing and joking and finally Bowie and Lou relaxed and managed to give each other a hug. That's when Bowie asked me to join the band. I liked Bowie and I liked the music, so I got the gig."

## What was it like working with Zappa?

"He was the best. I had all the freedom in the world. When I grew up in Liverpool, we had terrible radio in England. If you listened to the Top 40, you'd hear everything from a marching band to an opera, to jazz. It was incredible how mixed it was. I would get used to hearing marches and all that, so I would practise on the snare drum and play along. When Frank Zappa pulled out these different song pieces, I just played what was in my mind. If it was marching, if it was a polka, it just fit in with my mind. It was simple for me, but Zappa couldn't get an American drummer to do that. He asked me to join him and come to America. I lived with him for eight months at his house. I also roomed with him in the hotels on tour. He liked all the quirky things that I came up with. Frank just used things, phrases and stuff. He spent hours, *days* working on stuff locked away in a studio."

## Did Zappa have many written parts or charts?

"It was memory when I first joined. You'd memorise three hours of complex music and it all changed when we went on stage! He had a fantastic way of teaching you how to understand the most dramatic parts. Frank said I had an elephant's memory because I could remember everything. With *Waka/Jawaka* and *The Grand Wazoo* we began using rhythm charts."

## Is there a drum beat, groove or riff that you wish you had come up with?

"Not really, no. I don't really listen to riffs, I hear music and I just play. I don't really sit down and study riffs. I'm ad lib."

## Do you still practise, and what advice would you offer as far as a practice regime goes?

"Well, I think practising is most important. You have to keep limber. That was the one thing that I remember Joe Morello saying. He had to practise every day and this was when he was 35 years old. I didn't find that was the case, but I did it because Joe's main thing was to practise. I saw him in Liverpool right after 'Take Five' came out. I was amazed how good he was. I warm up a minimum of an hour before I play. If I don't do that, I really pay for it on stage."

## You play both traditional and matched grip. Which grip are you more comfortable with, and do you adapt it to the situation that you're playing in?

"I'm still adapting [*laughs*]! I was much more comfortable and have so much more technique with traditional. I changed to matched grip for Journey's situation. I was on the road and didn't have time to spend three months practising a new way of holding sticks. I had to go out there and B-S my way through, which was good. It forced me to play more matched grip than I ever wanted to. Now, I play matched grip

most of the time. I do switch around occasionally, whenever I feel like it."

## Did you work a lot with click tracks when you were in the studio?

"It all depends on the band. Nowadays, it's all done with Pro-Tools, so it's all click track. They can use other versions of what you've done. They want to have it all synched up. I'm quite at home with a click track. It doesn't change my feel. I use it for practising."

## You've played with many guitar-orientated bands. Did you alter your relationship with the bass and rhythm section or did you take the same approach each time?

"Well, I always listen to guitar. I like to hear and chase the lead player. It comes from listening to and playing jazz. After backing up sax leads or whatever, you're always playing something to edge them on. I try to incorporate that in much of the rock lead sections without playing jazz, by giving them something they can use in their solos. What a drummer does is almost like watching a movie with the music. When the band's playing, the drummer's doing the music to the film. They've got the film going and we're playing the part they can't."

## What's your approach to double bass?

"If I'm playing double bass when singing is going on I don't hit the first note on the one, two, three, or four. I leave that blank for the snare drum. I play the in-between notes like the 'e', '8' or 'a', on the kicks. It sounds like I'm playing on every beat but if you listen, you'll hear the snare drum much louder than if I played the kicks underneath it. If you play every beat, you lose the power of the snare drum. It disappears."

## You're known for your solos, do you have a framework that you use?

"I have multiple frameworks I use and adapt, depending on how I feel. If everything sounds good, you can delve deeper. If the sound is crappy, I go for things that make sense but keep it brisk. Even though I'm using in-ear monitors, the hall can work against you and take the sound out of your ears. It's a lot to do with what it feels like. I play by feel. Always have." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Frank Zappa, David Bowie, Journey, Whitesnake

### CLASSIC CUTS: Frank

Zappa *Waka Jawaka*

(1972), David Bowie *Diamond Dogs* (1974),

Whitesnake *Whitesnake* (1987)







# Bill Bruford

Pioneering progressive rock drummer Bill Bruford enjoyed massive success with Yes and King Crimson, both of whom benefited from his tasteful and inventive jazz-influenced playing

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**B**ill Bruford has always had a very English attitude towards drumming. Bruford can swing, improvise and rock hard when duty calls – but he has never been a man for wild drum battles or rock'n'roll antics. Yet Bill was hailed as the coolest dude on the planet when he first grabbed attention with progressive rock group Yes back in 1968. He was also quickly recognised as the most tasteful and inventive drummer in rock.

Yes was a great starting point for a drummer who began his musical odyssey as a modern jazz fan. When his schoolmates were into The Beatles, Bruford was besotted by Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers. Blakey inspired Bill to take up drumming more than Ringo Starr, and yet his earliest gigs were with earthy blues groups that provided the necessary 'chops' to cope with anything that more demanding band leaders – such as Jon Anderson with Yes or Robert Fripp with King Crimson – might throw at him.

Bruford's light, deft technique was perfect for the sophisticated arrangements Yes featured on their early albums. When he left Yes in 1974 to join the explosive King Crimson, it was a blow to Yes but allowed Bruford to continue his personal development. During a remarkable career that spans 40 years, Bruford has shared the stage with Phil Collins in Genesis, play with orchestras, big bands and duos, his own electric rock outfit and the more jazz-committed Earthworks.

## How and when did you get into drumming?

"When I was at boarding school in the 1960s, most of my friends were into modern jazz. I used to watch a BBC TV series called *Jazz 625* that often featured Art Blakey, Max Roach and Philly Joe Jones. I would play along with the drummers on TV with a pair of brushes on the back of an LP sleeve. It was a perfect education."

## When did you get a proper drum kit?

"I got a rudimentary kit at school and began playing with a group of 17-year-olds who played jazz very well. Their regular drummer was leaving and he showed me how to improvise. He gave me the Jim Chapin book and said 'Go to work.' So I grew up learning to play 'ting ting, ta ting,' rather than 'boom, boom, chick.'"

## What were your earliest musical influences?

"We heard The Beatles and The Rolling Stones and thought they were quite good, but not nearly as good as Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers! Jazz was pretty hip – it was American and exotic."

## How did you get your big break?

"I answered an advert in *Melody Maker*. That's how I made contact with Jon Anderson, who was forming a new group called Yes. I started gigging with them and we played Wilson Pickett's 'In the Midnight Hour'. We only had one tune! But the bass player Chris Squire and Jon sang in harmony, and I thought that was pretty

slick. Our first guitar player owned a bright orange Mini with blacked out windows. How could I refuse the gig?"

## Yes enjoyed a string of hit albums. How did you cope with rock biz pressures?

"It really was a journey and a half. What would surprise people is my complete state of ignorance at the beginning of my career. I remember taking my first recording contract to a lawyer. I said, 'What do you think? Is this a good contract to sign?' He looked at it for an hour, handed it back and said, 'I haven't a clue. I'm a divorce lawyer.'"

## What was it like, drumming in the '70s?

"I was enormously fortunate when I began drumming. The rock scene was open to so many new ideas. My heart goes out to young drummers who are banging their heads against a brick wall these days. It's a very difficult scene today and we had it easy. Back then you only had to play a couple of rhythms and you had a gig in Black Sabbath. No, I didn't play with Black Sabbath! But I did play with Billy J Kramer, at a working men's club in Birmingham. That's a little-known fact. I also played R&B with Savoy Brown and lasted a miserable three nights until I was thrown out for trying to make a contribution to the drumset, in the middle of the guy's guitar solo, which is not a healthy thing to do."

## Why did you leave Yes to join King Crimson?

"My obligation as a musician and artist is to engage my higher sensibilities as frequently as possible, and I'd stagnated. The penalty for success is endless repetition. My aim was always to try and make a contribution to the drumset. That was my ambition and I didn't so much care what style of music was involved, whether rock, electronic jazz or new music. I wanted to push drumming forward a little bit – I thought that was what you were paying me to do. As Miles Davis said, 'I have to change – it's like a curse.'"

## Did you have more freedom in King Crimson?

"Freedom to hang yourself! The group was very demanding. I could play anything I liked, as long as nobody had ever heard it before. We were obsessive about thinking afresh and finding a new slant. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with Crimson and we touched all kinds of things that I would never have done if I'd stayed with Yes after *Close To The Edge*."

## What kit did you use in the early days?

"In Yes I had a full Ludwig kit with two floor toms. I had a big ride cymbal raked at about 90° to the floor in the style of Ginger Baker. I used to play a solo on 'Perpetual Change' from *The Yes Album*, but I wasn't wild and flamboyant like Ginger or Keith Moon. I was terribly studious. I took myself much too seriously, which I still do. I studied like crazy and spent hours thinking about what could be done on drums that could be different."

## You have a cool, relaxed stance while playing...

"When I see old film footage of myself, I'm leaning into the drums from being over enthusiastic. Now I think I'm a bit calmer and I do encourage an economical and effortless style. It's something I picked up from Max Roach. No wasted notes. He was a wonderful man, who I met on several occasions. He had an elegant and graceful style. I liked that. I was never a flailing-arms guy. I've spent my whole life trying to be quiet. The idea is to increase intensity while reducing volume – a very difficult trick. You must walk softly and carry a big stick."

## What have been the highlights of your career?

"I've been fortunate to have been on half-a-dozen influential albums. Yes was a big group. King Crimson never sold any records worth a damn, but had enormous influence. *Red* presaged punk and was noted by Kurt Cobain as being one of his favourites. Once he'd said that it started to sell like hot cakes."

## What did you think of jazz-fusion?

"All music is a fusion of influences, particularly jazz, the ultimate fusion. Fusion is this mistaken word now laughed at, like 'progressive' rock. But the early music of Yes, King Crimson, Weather Report and John McLaughlin was a 'fusion', and absolutely stunning. *Birds Of Fire* by The Mahavishnu Orchestra shattered all of us. Around that time I had my own group called Bruford, with Allan Holdsworth on guitar. We didn't think we were jazz-fusion – we thought we were a high-energy punk rock group playing fancy chords."

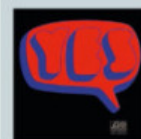
## Do you still get a thrill out of playing the drums?

"I play all the time and I still get a tremendous buzz. Just setting up a drumset gets me all excited. I couldn't possibly do what I do now without that level of enthusiasm."

## What was your proudest moment?

"I don't do proud moments. Do you mean like meeting Princess Margaret? I have done the occasional reasonable solo, and come up with some good ideas. I've been happiest pushing things forward a bit – I'm not sure I was cut out to just bang out four beats to the bar at the back of the band." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Yes, King Crimson, Bruford, Earthworks

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Yes Yes (1968), Yes *Close To The Edge* (1972), King Crimson *Red* (1974)





James Cumiskey

# Mike Joyce

As the backbone of The Smiths, Mike Joyce helped create some of the most influential and phenomenal British indie-rock music of all time

WORDS: PAT REID/RHYTHM

**T**he Smiths are one of the most successful and best-loved bands ever to come out of Manchester. Boasting the '80s' most controversial but brilliant songwriter in Morrissey and the virtuoso guitar of Johnny Marr, they were nevertheless a true band. Take away the melodic bass of Andy Rourke or the incredible playing of sticksman Mike Joyce, and the Lennon/McCartney of indie wouldn't have had quite the same impact.

"I'm not saying, 'Oh, we shouldn't have split up, we should have carried on, everything would have been great,'" Joyce sums it up, "but you know that saying, sum of the parts? It really seems to me that that's the case with The Smiths. Morrissey's 'Suedehead' was great, some of the Electronic stuff is great, but I don't understand why it can't be anything as mind-blowing as The Smiths. I'd like to think that's because I'm not on it [laughs]. One would, wouldn't one? Because it's not Johnny, me and Andy."

Whether powering hits like 'What Difference Does It Make', providing a train-like shuffle behind 'Shakespeare's Sister' or the balls-out solo drum intro to 'The Queen Is Dead', Joyce's beats were as much a part of that slice of musical history as Morrissey's back pocket-full of gladioli and NHS specs. *Rhythm* met Mike in 1999 to hear his part in The Smiths story.

## What first made you aware of music?

"I was the youngest in the family. I had two sisters and two older brothers so there were a lot of teenagers around when I was 10 or 11. They had a lot of parties and people hanging out. They were into a lot of mod stuff; my sister was very into the Northern Soul scene. The music, football and fashion all intermingled, so I got off on a lot of that. But mainly it was the punk thing that really hit me in the face. I suppose at that age I just wanted to rebel. I went to see The Buzzcocks supported by The Slits. I thought it was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. There was a dangerous element, but it was intelligent danger."

## And that's what got you into the drums?

"I remember looking at John Maher, who was playing [The Buzzcocks] drums, and thinking, I want to do that. Two years above me at school was Mark Riley [now 6 Music DJ] who was in The Fall, so that was quite cool, but it was The Buzzcocks that did it. I think it was the fact they were smiling - there was a lot of laughter and enjoyment. And great songs. I was smitten."

## What was your first band?

"I answered an advert in the *Manchester Evening News*, a local group called Hoax were looking for a drummer. We did a rehearsal in this place where Joy Division and The Buzzcocks used to rehearse. We were very punky with a bit of reggae influence. Then I got a phone call from this Irish lad called Wes Graham who'd come over to England. I hooked up [with him] and we did a lot of

gigs. London gigs and stuff. Joe, the main songwriter, was good. It was intelligent punk, like Magazine or PiL."

## How did you join The Smiths?

"A mate of mine knew this guy called Johnny Marr who worked in a place in Manchester called X Clothes and was looking for a drummer, so I went down to see what he was like. Johnny's guitar playing really blew me away. I'd never heard anybody play like that before. He was unique. I realised how important what he was doing was. The audition didn't last that long. I was going out into town afterwards and I'd had some mushrooms. After a while it started getting fuzzy around the edges. Johnny said, 'That's great, thanks a lot.' I'm glad he said that, if we'd carried on I don't know what my playing would have degenerated into."

## Was Morrissey there?

"Yes, I met Morrissey, said hello, and he sang. At the time it didn't have any importance whatsoever because it wasn't an audition for The Smiths. Johnny had met Morrissey a few weeks previously and they were getting a band together. It didn't register as being a seminal point in my career at all. But I remember playing and just looking over at Morrissey. Unlike most blokes I'd met in bands, he said very little. I was talking about it with the lad I was living with, and I said, 'These guys are fantastic, there's something really interesting in it.'"

## That was around 1982?

"Late '82. I've got a rehearsal tape from December '82. Someone from Pinnacle phoned me up and said they had the rights for *The Old Grey Whistle Test* gig that we did in 1984 at Derby Assembly Rooms and she wanted to know if I'd be interested in it coming out. I didn't have a problem with that, but Johnny wasn't happy with it. The guitars were out of tune and it wasn't a particularly good performance. And that's the problem really. *Rank*, the album recorded at The National in Kilburn, that was more like The Smiths. People talk about how miserable The Smiths were. Well, miserable we weren't, far from it. I've been to hundreds, thousands of gigs since and I've never seen anything like a Smiths gig. I've never seen an audience react at any gig I've been to since like they did at The Smiths. It was quite unbelievable."

"*Strangeways Here We Come* is probably my favourite Smiths album. The great thing about Johnny's writing and the great thing about The Smiths is that every single track was radically different from the next. But *Strangeways*... was the most reflective. It was our *Sergeant Peppers* really. A studio album. Most of the time we'd gig songs and then record them. Obviously we'd been doing gigs before the first album, whereas with *Strangeways* we went in and it was written in the studio. We'd grown up a bit I suppose. I was personally trying to impress Johnny, Andy and Morrissey with my playing. Johnny was just trying to see how far he could

really push it. To write those songs is pretty stunning, to actually play like he does is pretty stunning, and then to produce a record like that and arrange it."

## I always loved The Smiths' more punky stuff as well, tracks like 'London'.

"Yeah, it seems to have two totally contrasting styles - the sweetness and tenderness of Morrissey's voice coupled with a virtually heavy metal track. When we played 'Meat Is Murder' the stage would be bathed in red and we'd have an eerie intro tape. It was powerful subject matter that used to be tackled by Morrissey. It must have been mind-blowing to hear that, to see that. I became a vegetarian after that and I'm still a vegetarian so it had quite an effect on me. The subject matter was second-to-none. Anybody who could write a pop song about someone in a wheelchair or about the 'Moors Murders' - his style was incredible. Unique."

## The all-round musicianship in The Smiths was pretty stunning.

"The volume of work was precious to us all. I like to think of my drumming as complementary. I like to think that my role within a group is to complement the song and songwriting. When we first started playing, Andy was really into a lot of funk, his bass playing was very hot, tight on the beat, and I came in thrashing away. After about the second or third year he said, 'It might be a good idea if the bass drum and bass guitar actually played at the same time.' I took it on board but I still went with the guitar a lot of the time. Andy is such an incredible bass player that he plays a melody within the song, you can take The Smiths songs away and the bassline itself is a tune."

## Were you influenced by other drummers?

"Apart from John Maher I didn't think of drummers as being heroes. I just liked the fact that they looked like they were having a good time. I wasn't being flippant about my art, I took it all very seriously, but there is room for humour. There were times when I'd really get into it and enjoy it, rather than thinking we were serious artists. But I think my biggest influence was The Smiths; they were the best band I'd ever heard." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Smiths, Morrissey, Sinead O'Connor, The Buzzcocks, PiL, Aziz Ibrahim

### CLASSIC CUTS:

The Smiths *The Smiths* (1984), The Smiths *Meat Is Murder* (1985), The Smiths *The Queen Is Dead* (1986), The Smiths *Strangeways Here We Come* (1987)







# Hal Blaine

One of the most recorded session drummers ever, Hal Blaine was part of the infamous Wrecking Crew of LA session musicians working in the 1960s 'Golden Age' of entertainment

WORDS: CHUCK PARKER

**T**he knowledge and stories that Hal Blaine has accumulated could literally fill volumes. He has the distinct record of playing on six consecutive Grammy award-winning 'Record of the Year' performances from 1966 through to 1971. He was a key member of The Wrecking Crew (the name coined by Blaine for a group of successful session musicians in LA in the 1960s), and if a song was in the Top Ten during the '60s all the way through to the early-'80s, the drummer was more than likely Blaine.

## What advice would you give studio session drummers?

"If you're going to work in the studios, it's really not different from working any other job. If you work in a department store, you want to be pleasant to your customers, especially if you are being paid a commission. The nicer you are to your customers, the more they might buy from you. They appreciate nice. I have a motto that I've used for years, and that is, 'If you smile, you stick around a while, if you pout, you're out!' I've gone through guys that consider themselves 'best of the best' and you can't talk to them! You can't say, 'We've got a five-minute break, please be back here in five minutes.' They would look at you like, 'I'll be back here when I want to be back here.' Well, naturally, you would never call them for a session again. In a short time, they would go through many producers who decide, 'We don't need this guy on our session, he's dragging us down. When you talk about talent and chops, one of the things you learn early in the studios is that 'less is more'. One good shot in the right place in a song is worth a million paradiddles."

## Has working with artists like The Beach Boys, and Elvis elevated your level of playing?

"Absolutely! It gives you confidence! Often times you would do a session, I don't know about today's sessions, but in those days sometimes a producer would say, 'Look, on the intro I'd like you to get that feeling of The Beatles for the first eight bars, and then maybe we could go into an Animals thing on the second eight bars, and then a certain bridge like another group.' I would say, 'Look, that's all well and wonderful and I'll do whatever you want, that's what you hire me for, but wouldn't you rather make a record that the other groups would say, 'Hey, let's make a record like that?' Make your own record that you're proud of. You don't need a Beatles beginning and a something else, which starts to sound like it's put together by committee. So, they would say, 'You're absolutely right, I should have thought of that!' I don't think there ever was a producer who said, 'No, I want to do it this way.' Because there's a certain respect that precedes you when you go in the studio when you've had all these hits, I must know what I'm talking about! It's kinda nice and I don't mean that in an egotistical way. Guys appreciate that in the long run. Especially if they get a gold or platinum record!"

## Have you ever made a 'beautiful mistake', like an accident that became a key part of the song?

"When you're a professional and you've done it as long as I have, you learn that when you make a mistake, if you do it every eight bars, it's not a mistake! The perfect example of that is Phil Spector's hit, 'Be My Baby' [released in 1963, it reached Number Two on the US Billboard Pop Singles Chart and Number Four on the UK's Record Retailer] which starts out 'boom, boom-boom, bang - boom, boom-boom, bang' [a '1, &-3, 4' pulse]. Now, who knows or not if that was actually 'written'. We may have been rehearsing it as a 'boom, bop, boom-boom, bop' ['1, 2 & 3, 4'], and then we got into recording the thing and it was, 'Start it Hal!' and I went 'boom!' and I missed the snare on the second beat but I got it on the fourth beat. So I did it every bar! I made the adjustment in a nano-second and before you know it, the song is based on that. That was around 1961. Around 1964/65, I go in and do a record with Frank Sinatra, 'Strangers In The Night'. Guess what the beat was that I played to it? 'Boom, boom-boom, bop'. It was a Number One record as well as a Grammy award winner! But it was the same beat.

"Another perfect example was not exactly a mistake, it was on my first Grammy Award-winning Record of the Year, 'A Taste Of Honey' with Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass in 1966. The beginning of that song started with an obligato horn piece and then 'boom!' It started. Nobody was coming in right, the horns were a train wreck every time! So, about the third or fourth take I'm sitting there in the middle of the room with all the guys and they played the intro and I looked at 'em and I went 'boom, boom, boom, boom' [mimics triplet roll intro], and everybody came in. That became the hook of the tune. That was the whole song. Just my comedy mind saying, 'You're going to come in right this time guys! How can you miss?'"

## Did you have any special tricks that you used to get a great drum sound?

"I know people talk about the wallet on the snare trick but I always had a hankie in my pocket that I taped on the snare just to get rid of the overtone so that it was a flat, dry hit. It always worked for me. Toms were usually wide open. There was a time when Rick Faucher, my drum tech, came up with a great idea, especially with the 'Monsters' [custom-made fiberglass concert toms from 6" to 16" that were mounted on rolling stands]. He had a seamstress that made what we called 'shower caps'. Regular bed sheet material the size of each drum and they had an elastic ring in them. They stretched over the head to muffle it and they recorded amazing!"

## Did you have a favourite kit to record with?

"Well, the one I used most and I guess you could call my favourite, was the four-piece Ludwig Blue Sparkle kit [this was a 1962 three-ply maple kit with 22" bass drum, 13" small tom, 16" floor tom and Supra-phonics

400 snare]. I had two identical kits - the other kit was a 1965 - so I could always have one set up. It seemed like every drummer in town that ever wanted to play rock'n'roll, suddenly they all bought Ludwig Blue Sparkle four- or five-piece sets! Herb Alpert used to follow me around the studios a lot of times at A&M and I'd see him looking in the window or the door and we'd take a five-minute break and he'd come back and be looking at my drums and asking, 'What kind of drum is that? How do you get that sound?' I'd say, 'Herb, it's just a bass drum! I do it with my foot! You saw me do it a million times!' He had a lot of problems after he had to get a road band and go out and do concerts. He couldn't get that bass drum sound that he wanted."

## How involved were you with engineers/artists as far as the drum sound goes?

"The engineers usually came in and did the mics. In those days, it was usually two overheads, one between the snare and the hi-hat, one on the bass drum and one on the floor tom. That was it. I remember recording with Simon and Garfunkel in New York. Their engineer/producer Roy Halee used to tell you to play. He'd walk around always listening to you just jamming. He would point, and that's where he wanted a mic. It was all in what you hear."

## How do you think the role of the studio drummer has changed over the last 20 years?

"In order to be a real studio drummer - and I don't mean just go into some guy's studio and do a record - in our era we were playing symphonic music at nine o'clock in the morning at 20th Century Fox; a big band piece at noon somewhere; by four in the afternoon we were playing some rock'n'roll; by eight o'clock at night it might be some more big rock'n'roll or just some great singer and an orchestra."

## What do you think about the current state of the music industry?

"Well, all the technology is fine if you know how to use it. I think it's very difficult to somehow get the right 'feel'. All I know is we used to go for 'feel' as opposed to robotic performance. When we used to do records, if it felt good, you had a good record." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:** Elvis, The Ronettes, The Beach Boys, Frank Sinatra, Jan & Dean, Simon & Garfunkel

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Elvis

Presley, 'Can't Help Falling In Love' (1961), The Ronettes 'Be My Baby' (1963), The Beach Boys, 'Good Vibrations' (1966)





# Cindy Blackman

Cindy worked with some of the greats of the New York jazz scene before hooking up with Lenny Kravitz, and going on to make her own progressive jazz and an influential drum DVD

WORDS: DAVID WEST

Perhaps best known in rock circles for her 11-year stint as Lenny Kravitz's touring drummer, Cindy Blackman has also recorded an impressive body of work as a solo artist playing progressive jazz.

"I was a really little child when I realised that I had a love for drums," says Cindy. "According to my mother and my older sister, I was always looking for something to hit that would make a sound."

Born in Ohio, she was 11 when the family moved to Connecticut, and it was here that she got her hands on some drums and started learning rudiments when she joined the Forestville Fife and Drum Corps. Cindy kept playing throughout high school and made her pro debut with a funk rock trio at 13, before family friend Doug Woods, who drummed for Jackie McLean, played her a Max Roach recording.

"I had to discover a lot of things about the drums - independence and co-ordination, sound, touch, style, attitude," she says. "It was completely different to the things I had been listening to before, so that opened up a whole new world for me."

Cindy landed a place at Boston's Berklee College of Music but dropped out to take a three-month booking with The Drifters in the Virgin Islands. Returning to Connecticut, the vibrant jazz scene in New York proved irresistible and she started to make a name for herself in there. Cindy recorded her first album as band leader, *Arcane*, in 1987, followed by eight more albums under her own name, in addition to numerous recordings with trumpet player Wallace Roney. The influence of two of her favourite players, Tony Williams and Art Blakey, is obvious in the powerful attack and expressive phrasing that Cindy boasts on her jazz recordings.

## What first brought you to New York?

"I was hanging out with a person I met at Berklee by the name of Wallace Roney, a great trumpet player, so I would commute back and forth to New York with him. Finally we both moved to New York. I started doing gigs around town - I played with Jackie McLean and Joe Henderson, then things started spiralling from there. It was a really golden period for me because there were so many great innovators who were alive and well and playing in New York, like Art Blakey, Max Roach, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, Billy Higgins, Dexter Gordon, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis. So many of the people who created be-bop and jazz were there, so I could see them, talk to them and watch them play."

## Were there extra hurdles to clear as a woman trying to make it as a drummer?

"People still ask me if I'm a singer. Across the board people are not quite used to women playing instruments that are typically male-dominated. Hopefully we'll get to the point where people just look at you as an instrumentalist and don't preface it by saying 'woman'."

## You got to know Art Blakey in New York...

"Without Art I don't know where the drumming community would be, because he did so much in terms of the music that he played, from earlier on with the Billy Eckstine band, his innovations with Monk, the Jazz Messengers, the stuff he did with Miles - everything that he did opened up a whole avenue for music and for drummers. If you look at the drummers who were influenced by him, you'd have to name every drummer who came after him. You'd have to say Max Roach, Roy Haynes and Elvin, Philly Joe Jones, Louis Hayes and Jimmy Cobb, Tony Williams, all these great people. He's definitely an influence on me. I was lucky to be in the scene when he was here because if he thought that you had something going on he would take you under his wing, and he did that with me. If you came to see him, many times you'd be sitting there watching him and at the end of the night he'd pull you up and make you play. You had to get up there after listening to a whole night of him fire away at the drums and push the soloists into the heavens with energy and innovation behind them - you had to get up and you had to try to follow that!"

## How did your first solo album, *Arcane*, come together?

"It was all from playing in New York. I had been playing with Wallace Roney and he liked some of my writing, so he used a couple of my tunes on his record. Tony Williams was on his record and he came to town without drums. I played Tony's exact set-up - the sticks, the old Ks, the Gretsch sizes that he played, I had the complete set-up - so I gladly offered him my kit. I went to the session, set up the drums for him, tuned them and everything. The producer, Michael Cuscuna, heard my songs that they recorded and asked me if I had more stuff, as did Joe Fields, who was the head of the label. I said, 'Yeah, I write a lot'. So Joe said, 'Well, are you interested in doing your own record?'"

## Tony Williams believed in having to reach slightly for the drums so that you have a natural swing to the movement. Do you agree?

"For sure, because Tony didn't play the drums so tight and so close to him that he couldn't breathe. You had to work to play on Tony's kit. I heard him say it's easy to delude yourself into thinking that you're fast if the drums are set up so close to you that you can make it around the kit without having to move. I like Tony's approach because it's very physical, and I like the physicality of playing. For me, a healthy reach gives you a big, full sound and I can't do that if my drums are so close to me that I'm squished up. I need to breathe and my kit needs to breathe."

## How did you land the gig with Lenny Kravitz?

"Antoine Roney - a great tenor saxophone player and Wallace Roney's brother. Antoine told me that Lenny

was looking for a drummer, and he said, 'Would you like to talk to him?' Lenny was very nice on the phone and I liked him. He asked me if I had my drums set up and I said I did, so he asked me to play over the phone. I played for a few minutes and then I came back and said, 'Could you hear that?' He said, 'Yeah, I could hear it. I'm in LA, can you fly out here right now? Just pack for one or two days, come out with no strings attached, play with my band, see how it feels and then I'll send you home.' I went out there and instead of this relaxed situation he described, his management held an audition so I ended up in the midst of 40 other drummers. I was really tired because I had jet lag, so I went out in the yard, found a chair and sat in the sun. They didn't see me right away so they started the auditions and his assistant came out and said, 'Oh, Lenny was looking for you, he wants you to play.' I went back in and I played second. He called the auditions off at that point and his management said, 'Dude, you've got 38 other drummers out there, you've got to audition them.' So he auditioned the other guys and found two other drummers that he liked, and the next day he had me play opposite these drummers. Lenny still chose me and, instead of one or two days, I ended up staying there for two weeks. I learned his music and ended up doing my first video with him, 'Are You Gonna Go My Way'. At the end of the shoot Lenny said, 'So, do you want to officially join my band?' I said, 'Sure, when do we start?' and he said, 'Two weeks ago.'"

## You also played on Joss Stone's first two albums. Is the music with Lenny and Joss a different mindset for you as a drummer?

"It's responding to the music and giving the situation what it needs. When I'm playing creative stuff I'm thinking about the fact that it's got to feel good so the pulse has to feel good, but I want to then expound on top of that with creative statements around the kit. Playing pop or rock, you're completely entrenched in the backbeat and not expounding on top of that, because that's not what that music is about. Everything has to feel good, no matter what it is. With the jazz, you can really allow a multitude of colours and textures to flow in and out of what you're playing. It's certainly a different headspace for sure." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Cindy Blackman, Lenny Kravitz, Joss Stone

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Cindy Blackman *Arcane* (1987),

Joss Stone *The Soul Sessions*, (2003), Cindy Blackman *Another Lifetime* (2010), Cindy Blackman *Multiplicity* (DVD, 1997)





# Carl Palmer

As the drummer with prog rock legends Emerson, Lake & Palmer, radio-friendly '80s rockers Asia and more, Carl Palmer has six decades in music under his belt

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**C**arl Palmer had his first professional gig while still a teenager and has spent six decades in rock. At 18, he became the touring drummer for The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown, riding high on the hit single 'Fire', and from there formed Atomic Rooster with keyboardist Vince Crane. In 1970 Greg Lake called Carl to audition for a new trio. Emerson, Lake & Palmer became one of progressive rock's most influential groups, with a combination of remarkable musicianship and a fearless willingness to tackle complex arrangements. When ELP went their separate ways, Carl joined Asia in 1982. Now firmly established in the classic rock pantheon, Asia released their latest album XXX in 2012. Carl also has his own power trio, The Carl Palmer Band.

## What keeps you so busy?

"I think it's about doing what you want to do how you want to do it and at the standard you want. I still want to do it and I'm at the standard that makes me happy to carry on. If the standard wasn't there, if I couldn't improve, that would be a problem. If I can maintain a standard then I think I'll still be happy. I actually think I'm a bit further forward than that and I'm still improving at the moment. My feet are improving, that's for sure. I'm happy. You only retire when you're doing something you don't like. I like doing what I do."

## You're still playing with prodigious power. Has it been difficult to maintain that intensity?

"Not really. I've always been a reasonably loud, energetic drummer. That's the style I started off with and I've maintained that. The real answer is personally I don't know any other way to play. If I was playing a different type of music I'd play it differently but I'm a rock drummer, I always have been. I'm not a jazz drummer but yes, I can play jazz. I'm not a classical drummer but I can play classical music but this is what I do. This is my forte. With this type of drumming it needs to have energy, that's what it's all about."

## How did you get your sound on Asia's XXX?

"Basically the drums are left wide open, I don't use any padding, I just play them. I believe drumsets should have some ring internally. You can't isolate this tom from that tom because when you hit that, there will be something happening here and you want to hear that too. The sound on the album is not the true sound of my drumset. My drums sound a lot brighter than that. It's a sound that suits the music and the songs, it's not a true stainless steel drum sound. There's a piece on the last [Carl Palmer Band] album called 'In A Moroccan Market', that's the true sound of my drums, that's 100 percent natural, no manufacturing. When you've got a record with a singer and loads of keyboards your drum sound ends up being manufactured. That's one of the reasons I don't play with keyboards in my band. I find they take up too much room, especially synthesizers."

## That's interesting, given your time in ELP.

"It was very good then. I wouldn't want to carry on doing that. I find that guitars have more energy, more excitement, so I find the drums sound better in that environment. Usually with keyboards they are holding down a chord and playing something and it takes up a lot of that middle band of the stereo and it gets in the way of the drums. I think that any more than three people is always a problem anyway. I had three with Atomic Rooster, I had three with Arthur Brown, three with ELP and three with the band here. It's selfish really because the drums always sound better when there is less going on. There is more space in the music."

## Does leading your own group and playing in Asia allow you to express different sides of your playing?

"I've been with Asia since 1982 in some shape or form so for me they are old friends that I play with. This is the other end of the scale where I'm with cutting-edge young musicians. My bass player is 25. They're out of step with the time because prog music will never be quite as successful again, but these musicians are a product of that time. I'm playing with the best of what there is to offer. It's exciting. Younger musicians have a lot of information to draw from. There are a lot of great schools and lots of learning material available which wasn't there in the early-'70s, so you've got these great young prog musicians who don't have an outlet unless they play with somebody like me or they form a band and it's called Porcupine Tree. I don't care about it being out of time, it doesn't matter to me. I'm just after the quality; the quality is what drives me."

## So what is the dynamic like within Asia?

"John [Wetton, bass/vocals] and Geoff [Downes, keys] are really good commercial writers, they are good tunesmiths. That's what they're really good at, individually and together, so we know where that is. We all know about the playing expertise we've all got. I've known John for probably 45 years. It's a different game and we had a lot of early success when technology was in its infancy, when MTV meant something, when videos were being made by people like Godley and Creme who were setting a standard. Before that, going through the whole prog thing when you get played on drive-time in America in the '70s, right through to the end of the '80s when you couldn't get played because punk had taken over and now here was this new media, MTV, so we jumped on that and rode that for as long as we could. I've experienced a lot of things with those guys over the years and we always have a lot of fun."

## You mentioned punk, but you guys have seen off punk and grunge and everything else.

"I don't know why because things do change. We're there in a different capacity to what it was originally but there are still some of the artists from the punk period

who still play and are still pretty good, there's no doubt about that. I think we had a little more longevity in the fact that the music did cross over and appealed to the Americans. I'm not saying punk didn't go down well there, The Clash were big there, but I think probably the music that I've been involved with has had a little more longevity. I don't know why, it's just the way it is."

## When you step out on stage, do you feel any pressure to live up to your reputation?

"No, I love doing what I do so it's a completely selfish outlook. I play for me because I love it. Obviously I'm complementary to the music, I keep my musicianship high. I don't do lots of tricks and play in a flash way just for the sake of it. I do all that too but really I just love to do it. There is no pressure at all. If there are 10,000 or two people there, it doesn't make any difference to me. Once I sit behind the kit I'm in this world I've known for 51 years, it's great."

## You did the ELP reunion at High Voltage in 2010. Will you ever play with them again?

"I didn't want to do it anymore, I was done. I told them a week later that that would be it for me. It was the 40th anniversary. I thought it would be a nice thing to do for the anniversary, especially in England. I didn't want to go on tour. I didn't see any reason to pursue it any further. I did five weeks of rehearsal which was excruciating pain for me, which I did with as much enthusiasm as possible to get the music down. We've been playing for 40-odd years so I don't know why it took that long, but it did. We'd had '70 to '78, came back '91 to '98 and I didn't feel we could do any more with it. If it had been a band like Rush that only took four years off that would be fine. We took off long periods and if everybody comes back at the same standard, that's lovely, but if you don't then you can't sell that prog expertise that we are the godfathers of. I felt that it had slipped. It was still very good and I felt it should be shown once more, but I figured don't disturb the dream. Let people carry on thinking how great it was. It was great for me to do it but I didn't want to carry on. I enjoyed the challenge and the competition internally that drove the band, but when you haven't got that it gets a bit lethargic. For me, it was done." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Asia, Atomic Rooster, Arthur Brown, Carl Palmer Band

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Emerson, Lake & Palmer *Emerson, Lake & Palmer* (1970), Emerson, Lake & Palmer *Brain Salad Surgery* (1973), Asia *Asia* (1982)







# Tommy Lee

Behind the hard-partying and crazy, upside-down drum risers is a boundary-pushing musician whose embrace of new technology has kept Mötley Crüe's music alive for successive generations

WORDS: RICH CHAMBERLAIN

**T**ake Tommy Lee at face value and it's easy to undersell the true extent of his drumming skills, knowledge and influence. Yes, he's the hard-partying, tattoo-covered dude that plays drum solos upside down, but beneath the surface you will find a fully-rounded musician who has pushed boundaries with Sunset Strip stalwarts Mötley Crüe for more than 30 years.

Since 1981 Tommy has driven the multi-million album-shifting hellraisers with his mix of insane groove and groovy insanity. Whether helping develop and define the band's sound, penning and recording huge hair ballads or edging Mötley from their big-rock comfort zone into industrial, electro and back again, Tommy's leadership from behind the kit has ensured the Crüe continue to flourish and remain relevant.

Born in Athens, Greece in 1962, Tommy Lee had relocated to California and got his hands on his first drum by the time he was barely out of nappies, going on to sow the early seeds of what would become his ferociously creative playing style during stints with his high school's jazz ensemble and marching corps. By the time Lee met up with a young Frank Ferrana (aka Mötley bandmate Nikki Sixx), rock drumming had infiltrated his life.

## LEADING FROM THE BACK

The influence of such a spectrum of rock powerhouses as Neil Peart, Tommy Aldridge and John Bonham is stamped all the way through Mötley Crüe's early work. Listen to the Crüe's early breakthrough records and you'll hear that Tommy was leading from the back, propelling the band with his rough and ready punk metal beats and huge dollops of in-your-face, right up the front double bass. But Tommy is quick to note that his playing has undergone drastic changes in the three decades since these beats were put to tape.

"You know it's weird, when you start out - like on our first record, man, I didn't know what I was doing. I was just playing, I was overplaying - you're as green as you can be with no experience in recording or knowing how sometimes a song can work, when it's too much, when it's not enough, when it's not right, you're still learning all of that stuff. By *Shout At The Devil* I was starting to hone my skills for the song, that became really important. Early on you're also learning things that work live. A certain beat you'll play live and think, 'Wow, the whole place is moving to this.' Other beats may be not so much. So you're constantly learning, and I'm still learning. God, my views from the first and second albums on drumming are completely different now. I'm in a whole other different place."

While those early records depict a drummer finding his feet and exploring his style, Tommy was quickly adding new skills to his drumming armoury. By the time of 1987's *Girls, Girls, Girls*, the Crüe had carved their niche as the hardest-rocking hair band on the Sunset Strip, but while many would have hashed out

more of the same and cashed the cheques, Tommy was refreshingly keen to break new ground, in both the band's vibe and in particular his sound and set-up.

*Girls, Girls, Girls* retained Mötley's core glam metal sound, but saw Tommy embrace electronics. These first dalliances with triggers, samples and sound replacement would set a route that he continues to pursue to this day. Not only is it reflected in his eclectic solo work, but also in Mötley's catalogue. Tracks like 'Planet Boom' and much of 1997's *Generation Swine* have an electronic vibe stamped through them the likes of which few others from an era of bands reluctant to embrace technology had dared to dabble in before.

"Probably around 'Wild Side' on the *Girls...* record is really when I started to add triggers and samples and all the sequencing. I was f\*\*king with Digital Performer on my computer and going, 'Wow, you can chop up the guitars and do this to them, you can put this drum sound on top of this drum sound and blend the two to make this, f\*\*k!' My whole world just changed. Now it's become this incredible creative thing to me and I'm always searching for a new sound or if I hear something I might think, 'This would be great on the drums,' or 'This combined with the slap-back from this sound would be great for that.' It's just endless now, because basically now anything is possible. That's the beauty of all of this. If you can think it, you can hear it. Or you can build it and you can create it. That's way up on my list of inspirations and influences: technology."

As the '90s came into sight Tommy again showed his fondness for throwing a curveball, veering from the filth-laden, raw kit tones that helped Mötley make their name, and diving headfirst into a monstrous, unapologetically huge rock sound. The result was the US chart-topping *Dr Feelgood*, and again it found Tommy steering the ship.

The album's lead single is a song that Tommy contributed more than just an unmistakably hip-shaking groove to - he also penned the chugging main guitar riff. *Dr Feelgood* hit the top of the US album charts, earned them two Grammy nominations and went on to sell more than six million copies.

## EVERYONE ELSE IS TAKEN...

Tommy has continued to push new ideas and concepts into Mötley's hugely successful hair metal formula since. "Maybe it's part boredom, part thrill seeking, part, 'F\*\*k, someone's got to do something new!'" he reasons. "Sometimes you operate out of the fear of being the same as somebody else. I always say be yourself, everyone else is taken. That's a favourite phrase of mine that I constantly remind myself with... just to keep things moving and having everybody thinking about and creating new ideas."

At the end of the '90s, Tommy bowed out of the Crüe, instead concentrating on his solo projects. He experimented with hip-hop and electro with Methods Of Mayhem and built a separate career as a DJ. While

such ventures took Tommy away from the kit, they inspired his playing upon his return to Mötley in 2004.

"In that genre of fun I get to see what works and what doesn't work. The speeds, the tempos, all of that stuff is so important," he says, discussing the importance of making people move as a DJ and drummer. "The type of beat, all of that definitely comes into play when I'm thinking about playing a new song, or even thinking about playing some of the older songs. I'm always going back and keeping them fresh and updating them. I don't know if that's out of boredom or maybe I'm just constantly learning more and I want to put into the songs how exactly I'm feeling today. We already recorded it that way, it's that way forever."

## WELL-ROUNDED MUSICIAN

He's quick to acknowledge that his journey as a frontman, beatmaker and guitarist has fed into his playing, making him a more well-rounded musician. While Mötley continue to fill arenas all over the world, Tommy isn't one for sitting back and running through the hits night after night. Instead he toils to inject fresh blood into each and every track.

"Those sounds that were recorded on the *Too Fast For Love* record, they are what they are. Those were the kinds of microphones we had back then, the kind of compressors, the kind of drum heads, that was what we had to record with. Now the s\*\*t sounds so much better. We've updated the way the drums sound physically and technically, so that's exciting too because it doesn't sound like when we recorded, it sounds like now. It's big. It's how it should have been [*back then*], I wish it was like that, so it's kinda cool."

So after all these years and with so many different avenues now to explore, does he still love drumming?

"I do, I still love it!" he smiles. "But it's not my only thing. It's weird because whereas early on it was my main thing, then I taught myself guitar and I love to sing. I'm constantly evolving as a musician. Drums isn't my one thing anymore. I love to produce. I love to make tracks, write tracks, produce tracks and I can't just sit back as a drummer anymore. I have to have my hands on it and say, 'The guitar should sound like this, the bass should sound like this, the vocals would be really cool like this, this melody is not so good, let's try this.' I just have to touch all of it now. I just know too much!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Mötley Crüe, Methods Of Mayhem

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Mötley Crüe *Shout At The Devil* (1983), Mötley Crüe *Girls, Girls, Girls* (1987), Mötley Crüe *Dr Feelgood* (1989)





# Carmine & Vinny Appice

Heavy rock's most influential drumming siblings, the Appice brothers between them played with Vanilla Fudge, Jeff Beck, Black Sabbath and Rod Stewart

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

A young drummer called Carmine grows up in New York in the '50s and, unimpressed by the lack of amplification available to the stickmen of the day, decides to play louder and harder than anybody else. Before long this flamboyant young fellow has pioneered a new style, power drumming, and grown a large moustache. The cult of Appice is born. Next, Carmine's kid brother Vinny – 11 years younger than his rock star sibling – takes up the drums and, before you know it, is an amazing drummer just like his brother. By the '80s, the Appices' stylish playing and phenomenal power was underpinning many of the great rock bands of the day.

Carmine, who is responsible for a drumming style that inspired the first wave of hard rock players including John Bonham and Ian Paice, first lifted stick in anger with the legendary Vanilla Fudge, where he formed a virtuoso rhythm section with bassist Tim Bogert. Later, he and Tim formed Cactus and then Beck, Bogert & Appice with Jeff Beck. In a surreal twist, he then played in Rod Stewart's band, co-writing 'Da Ya Think I'm Sexy?'.

Vinny, meanwhile, honed his chops with Black Sabbath on their *Mob Rules*, *Live Evil* and *Dehumanizer* albums, before spending a decade or so with Sabbath's then-singer Ronnie James Dio. Classic rock albums such as *Holy Diver* earned Vinny serious accolades.

## Alright then, who's the better drummer?

**Vinny:** "Definitely me. Carmine was good when he started, but I just took it over from there! Seriously, if we were made into one guy, we would be the best drummer in the world. I'm faster and I'm louder, but you know what? Carmine's gonna say he's better!"

**Carmine:** "I don't say I'm a better drummer – I say I'm the original! People tell me I created something, but at the time I never knew I was doing it. I was just doing it out of necessity. When I came up – before John Bonham, before Ian Paice and all the heavy rock guys – there were no PA systems, so you had to play hard to get it going. That's how the power drumming thing started, because the drums were small. I even got bigger drums, because bigger is louder, and if they're louder they'll be heard better over your band's amps."

## What are the differences between your playing?

**Carmine:** "Vinny has much faster singles than I do, and his right foot is probably faster than mine. But I have more of a flow, because my vibe was r'n'b and jazz, so I've got more of a swing. Vinny's more tight. His whole thing growing up was to be louder than me and John Bonham."

**Vinny:** "Carmine was the originator of a lot of things. He would grab the cymbals – nobody did that. He played on the toms a lot, which was creative. And he incorporated a lot of Motown and James Brown into Vanilla Fudge's stuff. On some of those songs, when he's playing the beat, the feel is very black. It grooves.

He incorporated that into rock, which was cool. It had a really cool feel. And he started playing double kick, and using that big 15"x12" rack tom – no one else was using those things! His playing was also very aggressive, he was more of a lead drummer."

## How did you get started on drums?

**Carmine:** "Back when I started, drums was 'Wipe Out!' Hit drum singles. Early rock really wasn't that great for drummers – you had to search around, which is how I got into James Brown and his really great drummers. Motown always had some cool drum stuff, as did Fats Domino and Little Richard. But my main two influences were Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich. The first album I ever got was *Krupa And Rich* on Verve in 1955. I learned every beat and every note – it was very difficult to learn Buddy's stuff, but I got close! My cousin had a blue Slingerland kit, and I used to get on the drums and play when I was at his house. So I'd bang on pots and pans when I got home, and for Christmas my parents gave me a toy kit, which I broke. Then when I was 14 in 1960, they got me a real drumset – a bass drum, a snare drum and a cymbal, all single-tension. Fifty-five bucks! I played it for a while in my first band, which was guitar, trumpet and drums... awfully weird."

**Vinny:** "Actually, it was Carmine who got me into playing drums. When Vanilla Fudge's first album came out, I was about eight or nine years old, and I used to go and see him play with my parents. I said, 'Wow, this is amazing!' It was so cool to see everybody freaking out to the music. So I thought, 'Man, I want to do this!'"

**Carmine:** "Vinny started when he was about eight years old. He would see me on TV and in the magazines. I'd left my old Gretsch Red Sparkle kit at home. One day I came home off tour and he said, 'Carm, come look at this!' He took me round to the front porch and he sat down and started playing this funky beat. I was like, 'What is this?' It really sounded good. He had a good groove and some fills. I said, 'Who taught him this?' And my mother said, 'He taught himself.' So we sent him to a drum teacher."

## Who were your influences?

**Vinny:** "Mitch Mitchell, I loved what he played. He had some fast hands, but he wasn't a heavy hitter. Then when Led Zep came out, Bonham was my hero. Buddy Rich, too, he was insane. And, of course, Carmine."

## How did you break into the business?

**Carmine:** "I had three bands. One played everything from Merengue to folk to rock to Sinatra songs. We did a lot of weddings. It got so I was earning more from playing at the weekends than I did from working all week. It was unbelievable training as a drummer."

**Vinny:** "Our folks were really cool – very supportive. They insisted that Carmine graduate high school, but they were totally behind him. My father would help him load the stuff into the car and take him to gigs – this is

when Carmine was playing weddings and stuff."

**Carmine:** "On my father's side of the family, there's seven drummers!"

## Carmine, when Vinny was learning to play, did you help him out?

**Carmine:** "I'd always be there for him, whatever he needed. I'd go home off tour and check his playing and see if there was anything he needed. Then, when he'd become a real good drummer, we used to sit down together and figure out the stuff that Billy Cobham was doing. There was some stuff that Vinny came up with that I asked him to show me, because I liked it."

**Vinny:** "He was very supportive. When he came off the road he used to show me a few things, and I'd say, 'I can do that!' And then when I got started he was a good advisor because he'd been through the business. Like having a lawyer in the family."

## Vinny, wasn't it intimidating for you, having to match up to your rock star big brother?

**Vinny:** "It was a little bit, but I just took it as competition. Like, 'I'm gonna be better, I'm gonna keep practising!' By the age of 16 I was lucky enough to be playing with John Lennon and then at 18 with Rick Derringer, so it's not like I was struggling around New York trying to make it and saying, 'Oh, I'm just Carmine's little brother!' I'd already made three albums and been on the road by my early twenties. I'd established myself and people knew who I was. It's usually the case with brothers that you've heard of one guy but not the other. I wanted it to be equal."

## Vinny, you made it big with Black Sabbath. Was that a tough gig?

**Vinny:** "It depends. 'War Pigs' was always stressful because of the hi-hat. Everybody's riding on it. If I was to leave one out, Tony [Iommi, guitar] and Geezer [Butler, bass] would be freaked out because they're so set in their ways. So here you are in front of 15,000 people, thinking, 'What if I drop the stick or the hi-hat doesn't want to open?!' And then Ozzy had the crowd clapping along at a completely different tempo..." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Carmine: Vanilla Fudge, Bogert, Beck & Appice, Cactus, Rod Stewart; Vinny: Black Sabbath, Dio,

Heaven And Hell

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Carmine: Vanilla Fudge *Vanilla Fudge* (1967), Rod Stewart *Blondes Have More Fun* (1978); Vinny: Black Sabbath *Mob Rules* (1981), Dio *Holy Diver* (1983)





# Phil Seamen

The 'Charlie Parker' of drums, Phil was a legendary British jazz drummer who influenced generations of drummers in both rock and jazz

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**P**hil Seamen epitomised the romantic image of the cool jazz drummer. Eyes tight shut, cigarette drooping from his lips, he played his heart out to fans who studied every nuance. Witty, acid-tongued and charismatic, Phil was a world class player. He inspired fans and fellow musicians and was one of Britain's bebop pioneers. Yet his great talent was undermined by a drug addiction that blighted his career and ultimately took his life.

Phil Seamen was the Charlie Parker of drums. Born of the swing era, he absorbed the bop revolution and played with passion and feeling. Phil wasn't a showman in the stick-twirling sense. What made him special was his timing and creativity. He grew up in the big band era, but some of his most subtle work involved small groups. When American jazz stars arrived in England, Phil invariably got to the call to support such challenging artists as Roland Kirk, Freddie Hubbard and Stan Getz. Phil was greatly admired by rock and blues drummers including Charlie Watts and Ginger Baker.

Ginger grew up listening to the man he regarded as 'God'. During the '50s Phil could be heard playing on the radio and on records by the Jack Parnell Big Band. Jack and Phil engaged in exciting drum battles on tunes such as 'Skin Deep' and 'The Champ', which became highlights of their stage shows. When Ginger began playing on the jazz club scene, word reached Seamen about the dynamic new drummer. As soon as they met the two became friends, discussing drums and playing music long into the night. Ginger never forgot his former mentor, and in 1970 he invited Phil to join Airforce, a spectacular band that boasted three drummers; Ginger, Phil and Alan White.

Jazz musicians delight in swapping 'Phil Seamen stories' and Phil himself enjoyed the role of raconteur on a unique album called *The Phil Seamen Story*, recorded just before his death in 1972. He told jokes and stories that were as shocking as they were funny. Sadly he never completed the story of his life, as he died before the next session.

## EARLY AMBITIONS

Phil Seamen was born in Burton-on-Trent on 28 August, 1928 and began drumming at the age of six. His parents were so pleased they arranged an audition for him with Jack Payne, the top bandleader of the day. But when it was time for Phil to meet Mr Payne and show him what he could do, disaster struck. "I chickened out and cried my eyes out," recalled Phil. He carried on playing however, and when he was eight, his parents bought him a 'Heinz kit' (57 varieties) of drums and cymbals.

Aged 14 he joined Len Reynolds And His Metro Dance Orchestra, then aged 18 he turned professional, joining Ken Turner's Orchestra in 1946. Later that year he switched to the Nat Gonella Band. Nat was the top Dixieland trumpet player of the day, known as the 'British Louis Armstrong'. Said Phil: "Nat was a marvel. He was the greatest guy and he was like a father to

me." Phil bought a tutor book to learn to read and Gonella made his protegee stay behind after rehearsals to practise. "If I made a mistake, I got a clip round the earhole, sharp and swift. We used to get Tommy Dorsey arrangements, which had Buddy Rich drum solos written out. They looked like fly s\*\*t."

In 1948 Phil embarked on a residency at the Savoy Ballroom, in Southsea. Fed up with a diet of quicksteps, the renegade drummer disappeared during the set to return to his lodgings for a tryst with his girlfriend. He was in the middle of enjoying her company when there came a knocking at the door. It was another bandleader. Tommy Sampson asked if Phil would care to join his orchestra, a much hotter outfit. Seamen promptly enrolled with what he fondly described as "the biggest bunch of maniacs you've laid eyes on".

Phil also did a stint with the Joe Loss Orchestra. Phil thought Joe was, "A real gentleman. He treated the guys very well. He once made a classic statement to me. He said, 'Phil old boy, I prefer a gentleman to a musician.' Well, if you liked bebop that was a load of cobblers. Nevertheless, Joe was a beauty. I stayed with the band for 14 months and played 'In The Mood' and 'American Patrol' three times a night."

By now Glenn Miller was on the way out and the bebop revolution found eager converts. The new music of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie ensured rhythm sections had to change. Kenny Clarke and Max Roach showed the way. Seamen was blown away by Parker's impact and began playing with fellow modernists Ronnie Scott, Tubby Hayes and Joe Harriott.

He also teamed up with fellow drummer Jack Parnell. In 1953, the Jack Parnell Orchestra was one of the most popular in the country and the two drummers were featured on several rousing arrangements. Phil also appeared in films and on radio and television. He earned a lot of money from session work and steadily built up an army of fans.

## MEETING OF MINDS

One night in 1961, 21-year-old Ginger Baker was playing with pianist Johnny Burch and bass player Tony Archer at the Flamingo All-Niter in Soho. Says Ginger: "All the horn players from Georgie Fame's band would come and see us. It was like a modern jazz jam session at three o'clock in the morning. Well I was on stage playing and unaware that Tubby Hayes had come into the Flamingo and heard me. He ran back to Ronnie Scott's Club and told Phil, 'Get down the Flamingo. You have to hear this drummer.' I just finished my set, walked off stage and there was God. He said: 'I want to talk to you...' We went outside and he gave me a joint. He said, 'Where did you come from? You're the first real drummer I've heard in this country!'"

The pair got a cab and went back to Phil's flat where he produced a huge collection of African drumming records. Phil explained where the beat was placed in tribal rhythms, and once Ginger understood the

concept, he described it as "like a door being opened".

In 1968 Ginger and Phil played a drum duet at the Jazz And Blues Festival at Kempton Park with Eric Clapton on guitar. "Phil was on top form and Eric played the best I'd heard him. Phil later played with me in Airforce. He enjoyed being with my group but he wasn't very well. It's a sad part of his life story but of course he was involved in drugs. A lot of people blamed Phil for causing my heroin problem, which was completely untrue. I had already started using heroin when I met Phil. He was very upset when he found out I was a junkie. He was already a sick man and he got worse."

Ginger believes that Phil got into hard drugs after his marriage got into trouble. "It was a very sad state that he had got into. It wasn't so much the heroin as the sleeping tablets. In fact that's what killed him. He forgot he'd taken them. He took another lot and then in the end he took a triple dose. Off he went."

Whatever the causes of Phil's drug problems, they undermined his ability to hold down jobs. One of his most important gigs was playing in the orchestra for the West End production of *West Side Story*. It was a demanding score but Phil was the only man for the job. However, when he closed his eyes, the conductor thought he'd fallen asleep. He tried to wake him and a startled Phil leapt to his feet and hit a gong with a loud crash. He stood up, took a bow and informed the audience, "Dinner is served." Keeping his pet dog in the orchestra pit didn't go down too well either. But when Gene Krupa saw Phil playing on the show, he thought his drumming was "wonderful". A friend told Phil about Krupa's compliment and the hardened drummer burst into tears.

During the early '70s Phil was a familiar figure on the London pub scene playing with Dick Morrissey and Tubby Hayes. He tried to improve his health, but when I met him for an interview he arrived swathed in bandages. He had fallen over and burned his hands on an electric fire. Conditions at his flat were chaotic. He once apologised to a visitor, "Sorry about the state of the place. It's the butler's night off."

Sadly Phil Seamen died on 13 October, 1972 at the age of 46. He could have achieved so much more but he never stopped playing. He always retained the affection of his fans and, what pleased him the most, the respect of other musicians. **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

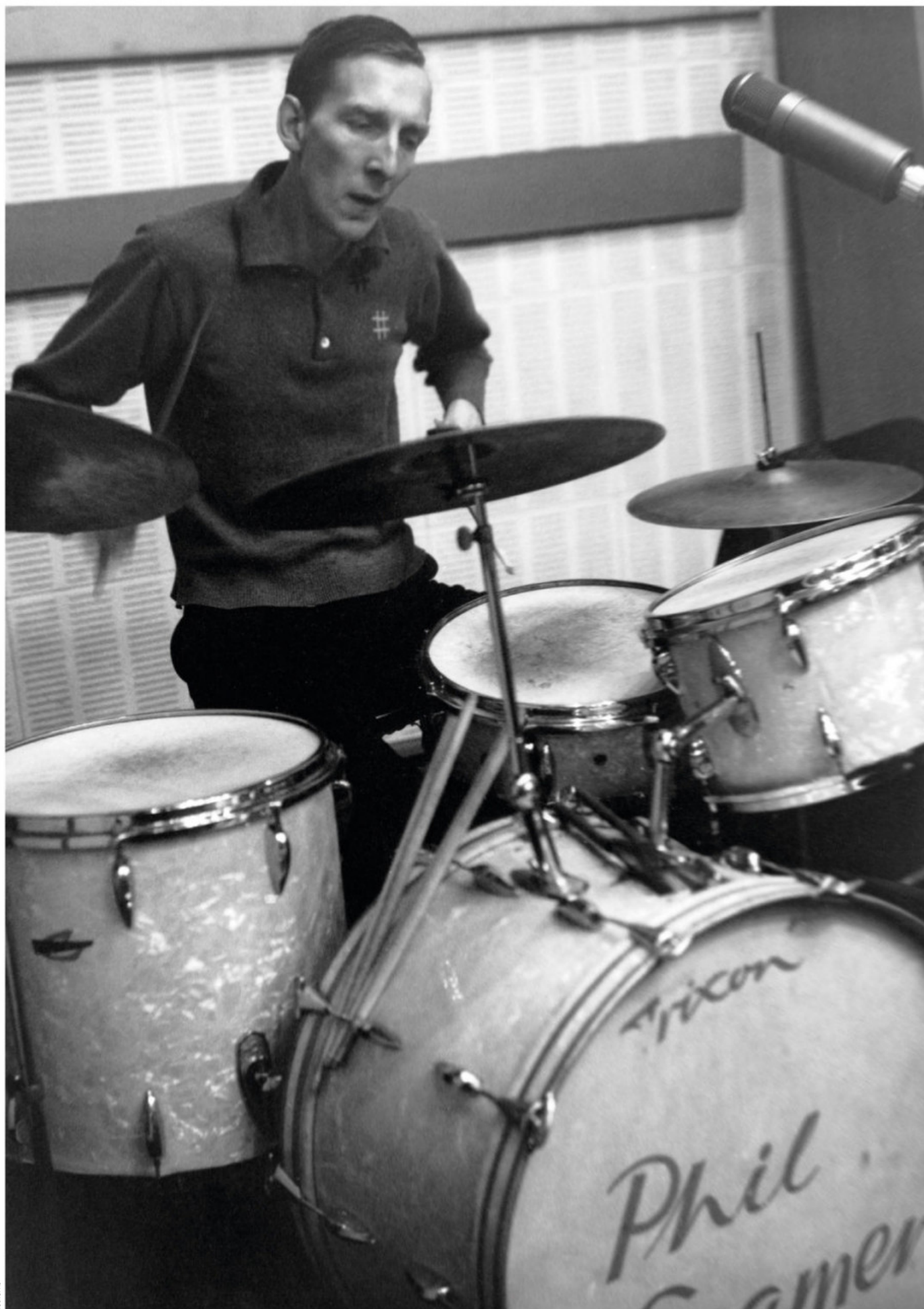
Nat Gonella, Jack Parnell, Ginger Baker's Airforce

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Phil Seamen Trio Now... Live

(1969), Phil Seamen *Phil On Drums* (1971), Phil Seamen *Seamen's Mission* (2011)





# Bill Ward

Black Sabbath are credited with inventing heavy metal, so it's fair to say that today's metal drum stars owe it all to the man behind the kit for Ozzy and co, Bill Ward

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

**F**ew musicians have survived a career as tumultuous as Sabbath's: after all, the band rose with unprecedented rapidity from the slums of post-war Aston, Birmingham to a commercial peak in the 1970s that saw them enjoy the status of Biggest Rock Band In The World alongside Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple. Not bad for a bunch of longhairs who started their careers as sporadically unemployed factory workers, you'll agree. Wielding the sticks in the planet's first heavy metal band was Bill Ward, who would stay with the band for an incredible 10 albums. Although Bill chose not to be part of the recently reformed Black Sabbath due to contractual issues, he remains an integral part of their legacy.

## How did you first come to drumming?

"My first introduction to drums came in the front room of the house where I was born. My mother and father would have parties on Saturday nights, and a guy on the same street had some drums. On Sunday mornings I'd sneak downstairs and look at these drums, and I was fascinated. Another big influence on me was the Boys' Brigade, when I was two or three years old - they would parade right down our street, and the big shiny brass drums really attracted me. This was not long after the war, in 1951 or '52, so a lot of that parade stuff was left over from the war. I was like a moth to the flame!"

## Which drummers did you listen to at the time?

"I listened to Count Basie and Glenn Miller and a lot of the American big bands of the time. My mentor is Gene Krupa, and then The Shadows and The Ventures and the other instrumental bands of the late '50s and early '60s made it reachable. Ringo Starr made it reachable too by playing things that I could actually play in a similar way. Elvis Presley was another big influence."

## When did you realise you wanted to drum?

"I started to really get serious and practise at home with my mum's knitting needles and pillows. Skiffle came to the foreground and really kicked me, I loved all that. I played the washboard, much to my mother's dismay. I'd get behind the drums whenever I could, and I got a proper four-piece kit when I was 10. Before that I used to play drums on the headboard of my bed!"

## What was your first experience of band-life?

"I did an apprenticeship in the clubs, booking my own gigs and everything, at 15 years old. We played soul music - pretty much all black-originated music. Blues too. It made me work to try and lay down the tracks right. We'd be playing the YMCA, that kind of thing, and we really put our heart and soul into it."

## And then you met Tony Iommi...

"Meeting Tony was momentous for me - he showed up with a Fender Stratocaster and was amazing. We were filling up the clubs, because Tony was already an

incredible guitarist at 16 or 17 years old. He was an exceptional musician and he made me realise that I was going to have to work very hard to go where he was going. I've always said he was one of my greatest teachers. We both got incredibly excited when dark, loud chords were played. We had the same taste for it."

## Ozzy Osbourne famously placed an advert in a shop window saying, 'Ozzy Zig seeks band. Has own PA, leading you and Tony to recruit him. Had you known Ozzy before that?

"No, that was my first introduction to the madman! We had the same feel for blues. His voice is immaculate for blues, and that's where I was coming from. At the time I was learning a lot of shuffles, like the ones that Mick Fleetwood or Keef Hartley do. That came from the States and that's where I was heading the whole time. I learned quite a bit of jazz stuff too, from listening to it."

## The Black Sabbath album was your first professional recording, wasn't it?

"I thought the song 'Black Sabbath' sounded f\*\*\*king phenomenal when we did it. That song was written at the Aston Community Centre! It was completely homegrown: about as raw as you can get. I've always regarded Sabbath as a live band and not particularly as a studio band, so when I listen back to the albums I have to remember that we used to walk in, grab some mic stands, record the songs and walk back out again! I was very impressed by the cymbal sound that I got at the time: they were Zildjians, although I've been with Sabian for years now."

## How does your drumming on the early records stand up today?

"On *Paranoid* I was never completely happy with the drum sound. It was just what we had available: we didn't have a lot of outboard like we have today, and the drums come across to me as a little wonky. If I had to do it again, I would run everything through an ambient mic and leave it at that. I'd completely get rid of all the close-miking. I know different today. I listen to certain drum breaks and they're more like 'clunk' breaks... Also, I was playing incredibly loud. Today, when I play loud I know that certain microphones just won't take it. Back then I was slamming so hard that everything just sounded like 'blat, blat, blat,' as opposed to a really good, solid drum sound."

## At what point did you feel that you were playing at an advanced level?

"It was starting to happen on *Master Of Reality*. The bass drum sound had started to smooth out on Vol. 4, and then by the time we got to *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, we were really coming along very well. When we did *Paranoid*, our band was out working 365 days of the year - so it was very much a band in transit. We were in and out of the clubs and theatres, and getting

close to playing in stadiums by the time the album came out. We were making incredible progress as far as our live shows were concerned."

## By 1980 you were suffering from an alcohol addiction. Did the booze hinder your playing, in retrospect?

"I was impeded a bit back then, but I didn't realise it because I was being driven by the passion for the music. Alcohol brought me to my knees halfway through the *Heaven And Hell* tour: I knew that I could not go on any longer. It had happened - I'd crossed the line and there was no turning back. That was it. I collapsed and came off the road, and went down the hole for about two more years before I got sober."

## Presumably it must have been weird going back to Sabbath without booze to rely on?

"It was horrible. I didn't know how to live sober, I had no experience of it. I'd been cut off from life since I was about 15 or 16 years old, so everything was new and very difficult. The first major experience I had was doing *Born Again* sober: on that record I'm completely sober, there's no narcotics, no booze, nothing. I felt separated from myself - like, 'What the f\*\*\*k's going on?' As a drummer, I had to relearn everything. There weren't a lot of sober drummers around at that point, so people couldn't say, 'I've been through this, Bill - this is what you do,' and I felt very much alone. I had to forge through and learn how to do it. In the end the drums sounded great. I kicked ass on 'Zero The Hero.'"

## What do you think of the new generation of metal drummers?

"Some of the guys I know now are just so incredible: over the last 15 years or so, the rhythm sections in our rock and hardcore bands are so good. I went to see Dimmu Borgir recently, and their drummer was like a machine - pure dynamite! It's a whole new world. I was talking to Jimmy Page not long ago, and I asked him what John Bonham would have thought of the new drummers these days, and he said, 'I know he would have loved them!' I often think of what John and Cozy Powell would have made of the new guys. They're still here, in the hearts and the souls, and they left so much for everybody." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Black Sabbath

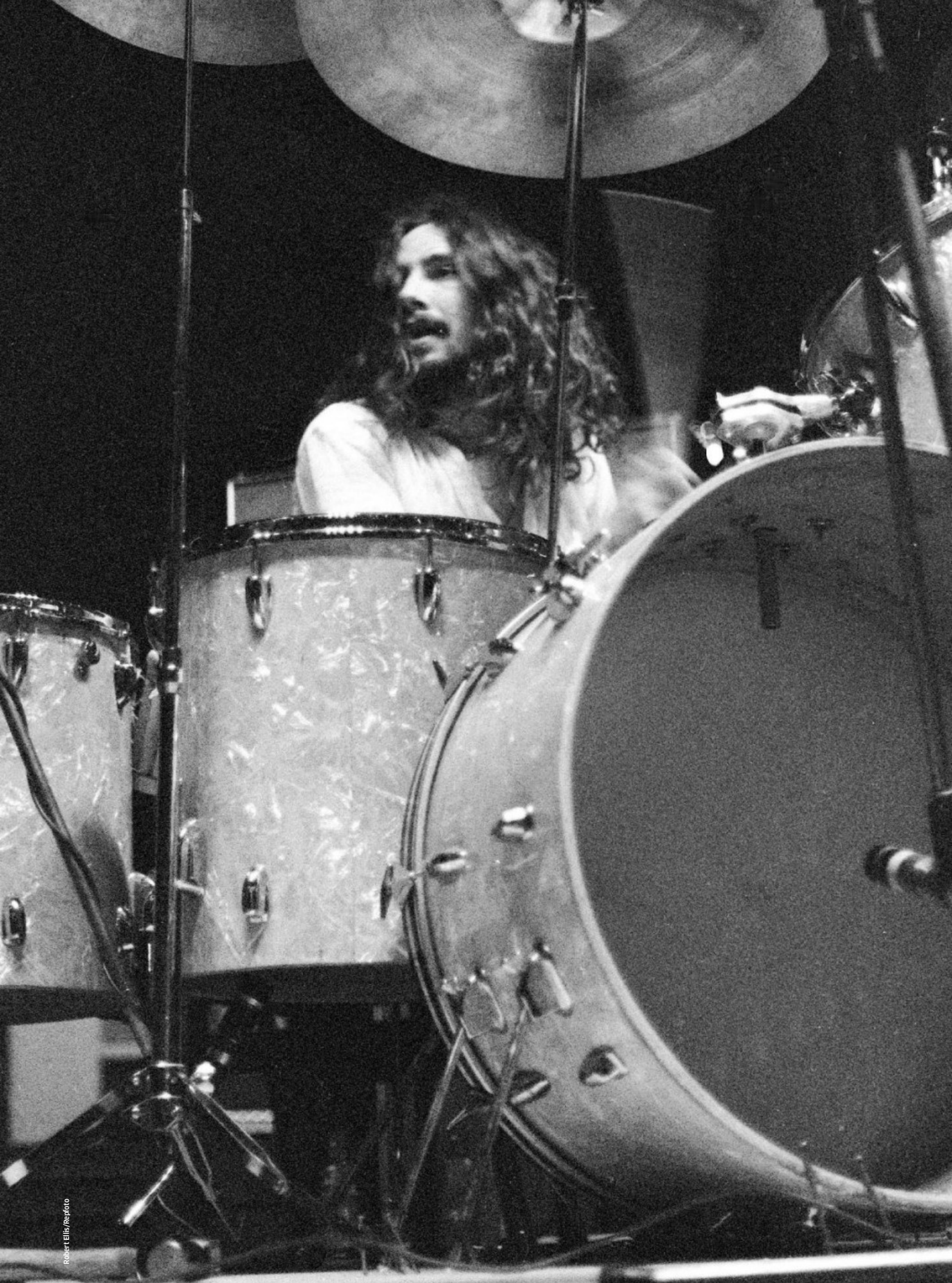
**CLASSIC CUTS:** Black

Sabbath *Paranoid* (1970),

Black Sabbath *Master Of*

*Reality* (1971), Black Sabbath *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (1973)







# Warren 'Baby' Dodds, Chick Webb & 'Papa' Jo Jones

Today's drumming simply could not exist without the musical foundations laid down by these three early maestros

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

## WARREN 'BABY' DODDS (1894-1959)

Way back in the early days of the drum kit, three special musicians plied their trade. These venerable gentlemen were pioneers in developing the bass drum, rim shots, hi-hat, ride cymbal, brushes and the drum solo. So not much by way of achievement then!

The popular music of today has its deepest roots in New Orleans where jazz emerged almost exactly a century ago. Although popular music blends elements from numerous styles, the defining feature – and especially so far as drummers are concerned – is the driving, syncopated rhythm. And the key instrument that provides that is of course the drum kit.

The kit itself is America's finest invention (okay, I'm biased), made up of military, vaudeville, dance, classical and theatre drums, cymbals and percussion 'traps'. And it largely evolved over the first three decades of the 20th Century. Jazz was first played on the march but soon drummers set the bass drum on the floor, added a bass pedal and the kit began its steady progression. All this is by way of introducing our first hero, Warren 'Baby' Dodds. A native of New Orleans, he was born on 24 December 1894, and is widely credited with being the first great innovator and stylist of the drumset, probably the first to record with a complete kit.

In Dodds' early career he played the famous river boats paddling up and down the Mississippi. His style recalls the military march with snare drum rolls and steady four-to-the-bar bass drum. The big difference is the syncopation that turned a stiff march or 'quadrille' into a swinging dance groove. The snare drum was the centre of the beat and Dodds' trained rudimental technique allowed him to improvise

complex patterns all over his drum kit.

Dodds was an accomplished musician and a good reader who prided himself on being able to play any music, not just jazz. In his biography, as told to Larry Gara (*The Baby Dodds Story*, first published in 1959) he recalls how he came from a musical family and his elder (by two years) brother Johnny became a famous clarinetist and band leader. As a teenager, Baby enjoyed classical music and wanted to play the flute, but for black musicians there were no opportunities and so he applied his sophisticated musical temperament to his drums and jazz, making him the most musical of early drummers. "I felt that drums have as much music in them as any other instrument," he told Gara. "Drums should play according to the melody and still keep time."

Back in 1999 I was lucky enough to interview Louie Bellson, taking the opportunity to quiz him on the early players. "Baby Dodds wasn't even using a hi-hat back then," explained Louie. "He played press rolls – and beautifully, so evenly that when he made the break from his snare drum to maybe a cymbal, playing a different rhythm, it was smooth and right. Then of course the drummers in those days used wood block and temple block behind the piano players. Then later when they ditched the wood blocks they played on the (wood-hoop snare or bass drum) rims. But they made that transition from press roll to cymbal to temple block so musical that the connection didn't bother you."

This style seems dated now in its tap dance-like use of woodblocks, rims and splash cymbals. But it is also highly infectious and syncopated – Dodds' whole-body 'shimmy' beat is joyous and naively exuberant. And its influence has weathered the decades. Ginger Baker always acknowledges Dodds as a major revelation who influenced his drumming enormously.

Dodds' career took him from the dance halls of New Orleans to the Mississippi river boats, where he played with genius trumpeter/vocalist Louis Armstrong while still young. He first recorded in 1923 for cornetist King Oliver, with Armstrong and his brother Johnny also in the band. Later he moved on to Chicago and eventually to New York where he died in 1959. In Chicago he directly inspired the swing drummers Dave Tough (Woody Herman) and Gene Krupa (Benny Goodman). As the foremost drummer of his generation, he played with all the seminal figures of jazz – King Oliver, Kid Ory, Jelly Roll Morton and Sidney Bechet. He is the drummer on Louis Armstrong's *Hot Sevens* recordings, historic masterpieces which early jazz scholars hold in highest regard. Unfortunately the recording technology of the day was primitive and drummers had to adapt (ie:

constrain) what they played to suit, but careful listening reveals at least some of Dodds' visionary musicality. This can also be seen/heard on YouTube in a handful of YouTube clips from the 1940s.

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong

### CLASSIC CUTS:

King Oliver's Creole Jazz band *The*

*Complete Set* (2008), Jelly Roll Morton *Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers* (1926), Louis Armstrong *The Hot Hot Sevens, Vol. II* (1927), Baby Dodds *Talking And Drum Solos* (1946)

## CHICK WEBB (1905?-1939)

Our second major figure, William Henry 'Chick' Webb, is perhaps the most heroic drummer in the history of the kit. During his short life he overcame severe physical discomfort, illness and disability. Short of stature, Webb suffered from tuberculosis of the spine which rendered him hunchbacked and yet such was the strength of his talent and personality he became the leading drumset player of the early swing era and the instrument's first major soloist. He was billed The Savoy King, referring to the Savoy Ballroom in New York's Harlem where he led his own orchestra from 1931. Although Gene Krupa's star eclipsed Webb's by the late 1930s, Krupa was in no doubt as to who was the master and had no problems admitting his admiration.

Louie Bellson told me that Chick "had a God-given talent. He couldn't read but he could hear an arrangement and not only know his own part but he could sing you all the instrumental sax and brass parts – a tremendous memory. I saw him play once, around 1937/8. I was so impressed with the dynamics he used and the way he energised the whole band. Gene [Krupa] told me that he'd play the Battle of the Bands with Chick and every time he'd say, 'I'm going to get another drum lesson tonight.'"

Webb is also famous for discovering the Queen of Jazz, singer Ella Fitzgerald, at the age of 17 in 1934 and she later went on to front his band. The Savoy Ballroom had two stages so that bands could play opposite one another. In the mid-1930s the clarinetist Benny Goodman, dubbed the King of Swing, did a series of dates opposite Webb. Then in 1937 he arrived at the Savoy on a bill advertised as 'the music battle of the









century'. The two outfits went head-to-head, often playing the same arrangements to an ecstatic crowd – the Savoy was the first American ballroom to allow integrated audiences – with literally thousands listening outside. Gene Krupa, Goodman's star drummer, later admitted that, "Chick Webb cut me to ribbons."

In a series of New York radio broadcasts discussing the early players (*The History of Jazz Drums*, 1989 – huge thanks to New Orleans drummer Stanton Moore for informing me of these programmes) the noted modern drummer Mel Lewis points out that Chick brought an aggressiveness into drumming that was not there before. And in doing so, Mel contended, all modern drummers owe Chick a debt. Before Chick, band leaders would not allow drummers to be that up-front. Chick made the drums shine, it was experimental, brand new at the time. And that was the beginning of an era that continued with Gene Krupa. Mel suggested that Benny Goodman saw Chick do it, saw the effect it had on audiences, and allowed Gene to do it too.

By all accounts Chick was a marvel of nature who deployed stick acrobatics and showmanship, but sadly there appears to be no footage of him playing. However, there are many recordings. 'Liza (All The Clouds'll Roll Away)' has amazing rolls, superlative control and pushes. 'Stomping At The Savoy' was associated with Goodman but originally arranged for Webb and played with more vim and vigour by Chick's band. You can also hear great fills, brief solos and set-ups on tracks like 'Harlem Congo' and 'Clap Hands! Here Comes Charlie'.

Mel Lewis also observes that Chick was the section leader, he had a strong bass drum foot and you could barely hear the string bass. He was in effect a one-man rhythm section. He changed up the sound behind each soloist, and you can hear him moving onto woodblocks behind the piano player in a manner similar to that employed by Baby Dodds. Mel concludes that the way some drummers arguably play too much and too loud goes right back to Chick Webb.

Webb was the first great soloist of the drumset and Buddy Rich considered him to be the greatest drummer before he himself came on the scene. It is impossible not to recognise the dazzling kit work of Rich in the earlier forays of Webb. Chick had that same aggression, panache, lightning reflexes, the ability to swing and drive a big band and to add peerless fills and set-ups. Rich of course became synonymous with all this, but Webb was there first.

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Chick Webb, Ella Fitzgerald

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Chick Webb *Strictly Jive* (late '30s),

Chick Webb *Stompin' At The Savoy* (1936)

## 'PAPA' JO JONES (1911-1985)

Max Roach said that for every three beats today's drummer plays, two belong to Jo Jones. Papa Jo was that innovative and he is often referred to as the father of modern drumming. He left behind the early-jazz woodblocks and snare drum press rolls and took the groove up to the hi-hat, the ride cymbal or brushes, thereby giving it a lightness and airiness which changed forever the way jazz drummers – and ultimately all drummers – played.

If Baby Dodds was a homely figure and Chick Webb cruelly deformed, then the Chicago born Jonathan David Samuel Jones was the suavest man ever to sit behind a kit. His immaculate suits set the tone for future dapper devotees like Max Roach, Wynton Marsalis and even Charlie Watts. His almost regal posture and upright, smiling demeanour is reflected in the way he played the drums and particularly the hi-hat, which seemed to have been invented simply so that he could dazzle us with his mastery of it. It's arguable that no one has played the hi-hat better since. Dodds carried the swing with his snare drum press rolls, Webb still employed heavy fours on the bass drum, but Jones elevated the beat. The legato jazz pattern gained air, conveyed with a much lighter touch, and quicker tempos simply flowed. Although Dodds and Webb undoubtedly swung, they (and their bands) had a chugging, four-square quality which now sounds dated. But listen to Jones – particularly once he became an integral figure in the Count Basie band between 1936 and 1948 – and you hear the modern jazz drummer, the open-closed hi-hats breathing life into the relentlessly swinging groove. The snare drum and bass drum are used more for accents, bombs, fills and markers along the way. Muhammad Ali coined the phrase "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee", which has always seemed to me to sum up Jones' drumming.

Regarding the hi-hat, Louie Bellson told me in 1999 that, "Jo Jones brought it into prominence. He could play the hi-hat better than anybody. And the same with

the brushes: Jo mastered both. When you heard his sound you had to shake your head and say, "Yes, that's it!" It was so perfect. He reminded me of a fan dancer – the intensity was there, but he would be smiling. Like watching a championship skater on the ice, you sit back and enjoy the graceful movement rather than wonder whether the guy's gonna fall down... because there are some players today who are in agony when they play! Guys like Jo Jones played with force but with fluidity and an assurance of where the instruments were, how to hit them and get the sound."

Jo was able to achieve this revolution because in the Count's band he became part of a rhythm team – with Basie on piano, Walter Page on bass and Freddie Green on guitar. This quartet, operating like a group within a group, supporting and cajoling one another, is forever known as 'The All-American Rhythm Section'. Before they got together the concept of a rhythm section did not really exist. And they did it – all four of them – with a lightness of touch and nonchalant, almost arrogant virtuosity which drove audiences wild with excitement. Not because they were loud, but because they were *hot*. The bass and guitar mark out a steady, pulsing four to the bar while Basie and Jones flit in and out, commenting and punctuating, the very definition of 'it's what you leave out'. Although light (it's wonderful to see how Jo held his ride stick just by his elegant finger tips) Jones was also powerfully propulsive, but his fours came from his cymbals or brushes, not so much his bass drum. And that is what gave it so much air. Unlike Chick Webb, who was the whole show, Jones operated in a collective, the sum of whose parts was greater than each individual. Which is why the Basie band was the ultimate swinging machine, the model ever since.

Papa Jo also played and recorded with Jazz At The Philharmonic, Illinois Jacquet, Lester Young, Billie Holiday, Teddy Wilson, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman, in duo with pianist/organist Milt Buckner and his own trio and sextet. He played right up to his death in 1985 and there are marvellous YouTube clips we can now all enjoy, a glimpse into a bygone golden era. We can even experience what it must have been like to witness the great Count Basie orchestra in its 1930s and '40s heyday, when it was like the greatest rock bands of today, though rather more elegant. An ecstatic 1957 reunion of alumni and star guests (YouTube: 'Papa Jo Jones Count Basie') is superlative in every sense – the rhythm section is unstoppable and everyone is so obviously loving every minute. It tempts you to wonder why modern music seems to have lost this pure emotion of revelling in the virtuosity and invention of all involved. By this time Jones has a full-sized ride cymbal and the way he drives the band with the surest and most musical of touches is a masterclass in a great art. **R**



## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Count Basie, Lester Young, Duke Ellington, Art Tatum

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Lester Young *The Jazz*

*Giants '56* (1956), Count Basie *The Complete Decca Recordings* (1937-39), Hudson Music *Classic Drum Solos And Drum Battles Vol. 2* (DVD, 2002)



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# Marco Minnemann

He may have played with some of the greats of rock and fusion, but Marco's most recent project, The Aristocrats, is practically indefinable...

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**M**arco Minnemann first came to public attention as a prodigious teenager with the German crossover band Freaky Fuckin' Weirdots. He was swiftly picked up by early punk legend Nina Hagen, before playing with acts as diverse as Kreator, Paul Gilbert, Stephen Wilson, Eddie Jobson and The Buddy Rich Big Band. More recently he's become Joe Satriani's go to drum guy, and has been touring and recording with his own outfit, Marco Minnemann and The Aristocrats.

## *Is it true that The Aristocrats started by happy accident with a jam at NAMM?*

"That is absolutely correct. We had a different guitar player before, Greg Howe. He did a few gigs and then for one show he couldn't actually make it. We had the option to cancel the show or find another guitar player who could jump in, and it was Guthrie Govan. Somebody wrote to us on our website, 'Why don't you try this guy?' We checked him out and then we met, he was like, 'Oh yeah, I know you guys, why don't we play together?' We started playing and there was magic in the air. The chemistry was immediate and the response was phenomenal. We clicked personally as well. It's one of those bands that when we travel in the van there is never an issue, we're all respectful to each other, we have the same sense of humour. That's the most important part to me because if you have good chemistry personally, you project the joy on stage to the audience and you get that energy back."

## *The band has a great sense of fun, but have you horrified jazz-fusion purists by not taking yourselves so seriously?*

"I don't know if we horrified them. I think maybe it opened a lot of eyes, and maybe some people who take themselves too seriously thought, 'hang on, people can have fun with this actually'. I guess that's part of entertainment, really having a good time. We do have some intense pieces and we bring them across that way, but we're also having fun. We don't try to take ourselves too serious, like, 'look at us, how awesome we are'. We want to play as well as possible, of course that's very important, but the entertainment factor is the most important part to us. If you're an instrumental trio the focus is on the music, and as soon as you don't have a singer you want to be as good as possible on the instrument because otherwise you would play muzak."

## *Have you ever stumped each other with a piece of music you didn't know how to approach?*

"You know what? No. We do have one piece, called 'Dance Of The Aristocrats', that I purposely wrote on sequencers, completely electronic, to see how are we going to do this with this band as a trio. Bryan had to get a special pedal for it with synth sounds and we had different pieces of equipment to make it happen,

working with effects. These are the challenges that broaden our spectrum."

## *You haven't gone for the stereotypical giant prog/fusion drum kit?*

"No. I don't need it. You can do a lot of damage with this drum kit. It's four toms, 10", 12", 16", 18", two snare drums, then usually a 24" kick drum, three crashes, a ride cymbal, two hi-hats, and a few bells and a splash, double pedal. I can do everything I could do with a bigger drumset. With Joe Satriani or Eddie Jobson or at home I have two more toms, an 8" and a gong drum, but I can do without."

## *What about in the studio? Do you have a favourite recording snare?*

"I have a few snares that I use a lot, like a Noble & Cooley 14"x7" solid maple, that sounds brilliant. Ludwig Supraphonics are always good, the 14"x5" or the 14"x6". These are snares that always come back for some reason."

## *What about tuning?*

"I'm looking to complement the shell tone. I don't tune them really too high or too low. The bottom heads are slightly higher than the batter heads - for some reason it creates more mass and I like it that way. The snare drum I crank, pretty much."

## *You're making life hard for yourself with some of the drum parts!*

"I know, man! It's a challenge. You want to push certain boundaries and you don't want to be boring - that's the worst thing that can happen. You always want to keep it exciting for yourself and for the audience."

## *How important is it to have your own label, BOING!, to release your music on?*

"It's very important, especially these days. Through internet marketing and Facebook and all these strategies you don't really need a record label between you and the band if you're into the business side and can control it. This is why we formed our own publishing and label. We have two other guys who control it with us and then we make loads of money [laughs]. It's as easy as that. The CD is doing pretty good, so we're happy."

## *Is it a challenge - since the band contains an American, a German and Brit - to get the gang together?*

"The songs are written in different places in the world and then we meet and tour. It's really that simple. It doesn't matter if I live in Germany or in the Philippines. The funny thing is, music mostly happens somewhere else, like in London today. It's sold out, which we're incredibly happy about. The entire tour is going really well so something must have happened. Sometimes it's

this chemistry thing. Bryan and I had different projects with Mike Keneally or Greg Howe and they are all great players and it all works very well. All of a sudden with Guthrie we had this thing, like The Police for example, there's a trio where it locks and everyone wants to hear about them and everybody wants to see the show. That makes us happy, but we never take ourselves too seriously. We enjoy it and try to give 100 percent to the audience all the time."

## *Is the power trio's flexibility part of your strength, do you think?*

"Honestly I think we should keep this trio exactly that way because this is our strength. This is how we've made an impact, and this is how we want to continue. We'd rather bring additional instruments to it, like bass boxes, or additional sounds that we can create ourselves. You know the old keyboard joke, 'What do condoms and keyboard players have in common? It's safer with them, but much more fun without them!'"

## *Do you all record together?*

"We hire a studio where we get the entire group together and work things out, and we combine it most of the time with a tour or something. We first write, then rehearse in the studio, and then record it. On the next album we want to write the songs, do a tour, play the songs and then go into the studio. With *Culture Clash* we already knew how we sounded. Since we got locked as a band we figured we could write separately and just go into the studio and have fun with it. The songs always evolve the more you play them, so right now we're there again where we were with the first album, 'Man, that song sounds different now than it did on the record.' Not that we're unhappy with it but we like to capture those different variations - so now on the next album we'll try to get a two-week tour together and then record. So there are always different approaches."

## *Are there any moments live when you're playing at your limit?*

"The drum solo. I always try to push the limit there, and a lot of times I mess things up there, drop sticks - that happens. There are always moments when you try to do something and we look at each other, 'Oh s\*\*t, that didn't work too well!'" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Aristocrats, Joe Satriani, Kreator, Eddie Jobson

### CLASSIC CUTS: Marco

Minnemann *Normalizer 2*

(2010), The Aristocrats *Culture Clash* (2013)





# Omar Hakim

From Weather Report to his own jazz trio via stints with Sting and David Bowie, Omar Hakim is one of the world's most versatile players

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**M**usic was always in Omar Hakim's blood. His father played trombone with Count Basie and Duke Ellington and, by the age of 10, Omar was gigging with his dad around New York. The precocious drummer did his first tour at 15, and a reputation forged in the jazz clubs of New York led to Miles Davis recommending Omar to fill the drum seat in Weather Report vacated by Peter Erskine.

"It was the first gig in my life where I had to use everything I understood about the drums in one place," remembers Omar. "They are throwing crazy charts in front of you, you're improvising and playing with the power of a rock'n'roll band but you need the chops because some of the music is difficult."

In between albums with the fusion giants, Omar was recruited by producer Nile Rodgers to play on David Bowie's *Let's Dance*, a record that opened a lot of doors.

"Sometimes musicians get typecast, so if they see you playing jazz, they say you're a jazz drummer," says Omar. "When *Let's Dance* came out it was so the complete opposite of everything else that I was doing that it didn't even sound like the same drummer. I think it was perfect for my career. Sting said to me, 'One of the first places I heard you was the David Bowie album.' It was like a dream come true. Because of all these different projects it was impossible for people to typecast me."

His list of credits is the envy of any session player, running the gamut from jazz titans like Miles Davis and John Scofield to pop mega-stars like Madonna and Mariah Carey, while his recent project, Trio Of Oz with his wife Rachel Z on keys, brought together the pop and jazz sides of his playing covering songs by Coldplay and The Killers.

**Your CV proves that you are able to play in a wide variety of musical situations. What's your secret?**

"My idea was, be the best musician you can be. Don't be the best jazz drummer you can be, don't be the best rock drummer you can be, just be the best *drummer* that you can be, whatever that means. I would never say no to a gig. If I didn't know how to play reggae, I'd say yes to the gig first and then I'd study. I had a situation where a guy called me, I was 19: 'Hey man, can you play reggae?' I said, 'Yep, I can.' Then I went to the record store as soon as I hung up the phone and shedded all these reggae grooves. Something in the back of my mind said, 'If you really want to learn to play this groove, maybe you should go dance to it. I went to this club, hung out there for three or four nights and when I got to the gig I was in the vibe. That's what music is, especially drumming. What we're doing is so physical you can't learn a groove intellectually or rudimentally. Every groove and every style of music has a cultural connect to it. You have to eat that food,

breathe that air, dance with the women. I've always treated music that way. When I started playing music my goal wasn't to be the best drummer in the world but to give anything that I'm doing the best that I've got and try to understand it on a deeper level so that I can express myself within it, and it's made my career really fun."

**You were one of the first drummers to embrace drum machines in the '80s. Weren't you worried you'd be out of work?**

"Basically because I was young, my mind was open and I was interested in technology, I wasn't like the older drummers who were a little more stuck in their ways. Everybody was starting to use them, so if you can't beat them, join them. I eventually purchased one and I added Drum Machine Programmer to my card. I'm a drummer for hire but I'm also a drum programmer, so I got a lot of jobs where I would program drums and then put live cymbals and hi-hats and fills on top of the drum machines. I was able to create work just because drum machines were new enough that not everybody could program them but they knew they wanted to use them for the sound.

"When V-drums happened and some of the earlier Roland kits, I jumped right on it because for the first time I didn't have to program those sounds. The jobs I was getting, people wanted an 808 bass drum, a 909 snare, so when I got the TD-7 and the early Roland kits I could set the pads up and it was me playing those sounds rather than programming them and putting hi-hats and cymbals on top of them. I was in a good place mentally to embrace the technology rather than be scared of it."

**Watching you play, you always look remarkably relaxed behind the kit. Where does that come from?**

"I've got to give a shout out to one of my drum teachers, Clyde Lucas. Clyde is probably the main reason I've never suffered from tendonitis. When he first saw me I was about 12 and he said, 'You play good, man, but you're working too hard. I'm going to teach you how to make the sticks work for you.' One of the first lessons was 'The Anatomy Of The Drum Stick'. I'll never forget it. He started talking about how drum sticks are built. It was like, wait a minute, if you're holding the device wrong, it's not bouncing properly. You can't move it properly so when you learn that, you learn how to choose the right one for your body, for your weight, for your arm length. There was that, but then my dad, being a horn player, always used to say to me, 'Stop holding your breath!' He said, 'I want you to lie on the floor.' He handed me some phone books and put them on my tummy and said, 'Breathe.' My chest filled up with air and I blew it out. He said, 'Take another breath but I want you to breathe deeper and I want to see that phone book move.' That was his way

of getting me conscious of diaphragm breathing. The whole idea of relaxation is your bloodstream being oxygenated properly. One of the reasons drummers tighten up is they hold their breath and the lack of oxygen in the bloodstream creates this burning sensation, lactic acid build-up in the muscles. Your only antidote to that is oxygen so my dad started talking about breathing concepts that were more like for a horn player or singer."

**So how have you applied those concepts to your playing now?**

"What I'm in the habit of doing now, whether I'm soloing or grooving, is to sing what I'm playing. If I'm just playing a straight groove with no fills, if I can settle into it, get my body situated right, get the breathing flowing, it's like a meditation. If I can stay in that state I can let my ideas flow and I can get out of the way. At some clinics people ask me about this and I say part of getting out of your own way is to remove your expectation of what you think the moment should be musically. It's like you move your own agenda out of the way and you start to connect with a musical moment that is happening because that moment is typically bigger than what you would come up with anyway. It's the moment that you release that expectation, that pressure - you're putting yourself in a mental space where you can just be in the moment. Your performance as a musician with your colleagues becomes more conversation-like, it comes alive as a result and it's based on something more human than anything you could actually practice."

**How do you think you've grown as a player since the early days?**

"I'm definitely at the point now where I'm just sitting down to have fun playing music. It's amazing what the mind and the body will do when fuelled by the soul. Victor Bailey said something interesting to me a couple of weeks ago. He said, 'I'm glad you're going back on the road again because people need to feel you.' There are a lot of people out there playing but are they really connected spiritually and emotionally to the experience? Go out and let people feel you, that's what I would say to all the drummers. Don't let them just hear you, let them feel you." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Sting, Weather Report, Miles Davis, David Bowie, Trio Of Oz

### CLASSIC CUTS: Sting

*Dream Of The Blue Turtles* (1985), Miles Davis *Amandla* (1989)







# Mike Portnoy

Since his shock decision to leave Dream Theater, the band he co-founded and had led for 25 years, the prog metal superstar has kept himself busy with plenty of new projects

**WORDS:** CHUCK PARKER/JORDAN MCLACHLAN

**T**he last couple of years have certainly had their ups and downs for the prog-metal drum star. After taking on a gruelling touring schedule in 2010 with a number of bands, Mike shocked the drumming community when he announced he was leaving Dream Theater, the band he had co-founded and led since the '80s.

Mike worked with Avenged Sevenfold on their *Nightmare* album, tracking the parts written by their late drummer Jimmy 'The Rev' Sullivan, for whom Mike was a hero. A tour followed, but then Avenged thanked him for his services and sought a permanent replacement for their drum seat. Mike came off the road and spent some much-needed time at home with his family while pondering what his next musical move would be. His notorious work ethic did not slow down or change though, and he spent the better part of 2011 recording and performing with a variety of different projects that were stylistically very different from each other, including Flying Colors and Adrenaline Mob.

## *What did you think of Mike Mangini replacing you in Dream Theater?*

"If there's anybody that's going to be in that seat, I think Mike is the right guy. He's an old friend of mine and I know he was very concerned about respecting my legacy. Everything I've seen him say about me and my role for all those years in Dream Theater has been incredibly respectful and I thank him for that. I don't hold against him that he took the gig. It's an amazing opportunity. How could he not? I find my days are much happier when I just concentrate on my future and let my past with Dream Theater be the past. It's something I'm very proud of and something that will always be a part of me, but it's time for me to move on and write the next few chapters of my career."

## *Did your time with Avenged Sevenfold encourage you to move to a harder rock sound with Adrenaline Mob?*

"Absolutely! When I was out with Avenged, especially on the American tour in the summer of 2010, we were out with Disturbed, Stone Sour and Hellyeah, I was surrounded by more aggressive, groove-oriented metal and I realised not only how much it's a part of me, but how much I enjoy playing that kind of stuff. Even though through the years, bands I've been a part of have had heavy elements, I've never been in a band that was strictly heavy without a million progressive elements thrown in as well. So, my time with Avenged showed me a side that I would like to further dig into."

## *Did you set out to be different in your drum sound with these projects?*

"I think it's all still me. I think the most important thing for me when I do an album, no matter who it's with, any kind of band, I want it to sound like Mike Portnoy. I think it's important for drummers to have personality in

their playing and that's a very important thing for me. So whether I'm playing in a metal, prog or pop band, I still want to retain my identity. Of course, I always play what's called for in the song. When I'm playing with Flying Colors, I'm trying to be more subtle, song-oriented and straight-ahead. In Adrenaline Mob, I'm trying to be more aggressive and have that balance to the grooves."

## *It seems you have your pick of the litter when it comes to supergroups and side projects. Has there ever been anything that you pursued that didn't happen or offers you didn't accept?*

"I've been very fortunate. Almost anything my imagination can dream up I've been able to make come true. I'm very blessed to have been able to play with so many great musicians. I've been very fortunate in that respect that I've been able to be so compatible and musical with so many great musicians around me. I'm absolutely a team player. Whether it be Transatlantic or Flying Colors or Adrenaline Mob, I'm not looking to be the leader, I'm not looking to run the show. I enjoy collaborating and working with other players and musicians. To take it a step further, I often enjoy just playing drums. Like with Avenged Sevenfold, I was just a hired gun to play drums. With Neal Morse's solo tours, I just play drums. When I did G3 with John Petrucci, I just played drums. I'm able to have different levels of control, input and leadership in all these different situations and I have no problem turning it on or turning it down depending on the situation."

## *If you could pick one musician, alive or deceased, to play with, who would it be?*

"My three biggest heroes that are alive are Paul McCartney, Roger Waters and Pete Townshend. If I could give you a dream gig, to play drums with any one of those three would be absolutely incredible. Obviously, I don't think that's very realistic. Those are the three living musicians I think that I would do anything to be able to play drums for. Deceased, the list is huge. Frank Zappa is my all-time biggest hero, so obviously to have ever worked with him would have been a dream come true and absolutely terrifying as well! I've developed a great relationship with Dweezil and I took Zappa Plays Zappa out with Dream Theater a couple of years ago so I guess that was as close as I got to being able to be part of the Zappa world for a while."

## *Could you pick a couple of highlights from your quarter-century in Dream Theater?*

"I think the crowning moment for me was *Scenes From A Memory*. We really needed to prove ourselves with that record and it was the album where John and I took over production duties. We were coming out of a tough period. I've spoken about it a million times - we were on the verge of breaking up. We needed to regain our independence. And we came out firing on all cylinders.

There was a lot at stake, so we had to pull it out of the bag. That was one defining moment for me. I was very proud of achieving that creative goal."

## *Do you ever feel pigeon-holed as a player?*

"Sometimes it's frustrating because I feel there's a preconceived idea of me that people have. I'm not complaining - the recognition and acclaim that I've achieved I'm very grateful for. It's a dream come true. But sometimes I go to drum festivals and think that guys like Dave Weckl or Steve Smith, who are always really cool to me, probably see me as this little heavy metal kid with a giant drumset. They don't realise that I love Ringo as much as anything else.

"I've seen some online forums where the guys are complete drumming fans, into Dave, Vinnie [Colaiuta] and all those great guys and write Mike Portnoy off as a prog metal ham. They don't realise that to me it's not all about technique. It's not about showing off. To me, it's all about passion. I just love drumming. I have just as much enthusiasm for Larry Mullen Jr as I do for Thomas Lang. To me it's all about listening to lots of different things and trying to encourage kids to do the same. I don't want to just push kids to play a triple bass kit - young drummers need to have a balance.

"A lot of people probably think that what I do is all drumming from the mind, that it's all numbers. But I put just as much emphasis on drumming from the heart. It's great having this trained musical background, going to Berklee and whatever, but that's just one aspect of being a player as far as I'm concerned. I like having the tools, but it's just as important to play from a gut level. Some of my favourite ever players don't read or write or have incredible chops."

## *But there's no escaping the fact that you're renowned for your way with odd time. Are you saying that your approach is just feel-based?*

"Actually no, it's not just feel. You can just feel it, sure, and I know that there are guys that play odd time and when they're asked about it will say that it's all just groove. In my case, though, I do pay a lot of attention to the numbers, simply because I was always interested in them. You can play by groove or feel, but I'm into the maths of it." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Dream Theater, Flying Colors, Transatlantic, Adrenaline Mob, Avenged Sevenfold

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Dream Theater *Metropolis Pt 2: Scenes From A Memory* (1999), Dream Theater *Black Clouds & Silver Linings* (2009)





# Matt Helders

From indie hit-makers to a more mature rock sound, Arctic Monkeys' Matt Helders has proved himself one of the most inventive and exciting drummers of the last decade

WORDS: JORDAN MCLACHLAN

Just when we thought we knew Arctic Monkeys – all skittish beats, skanking guitar and wry lyrics – the Sheffield songsmiths went and confounded expectations. The frenzied assaults of 'I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor' and 'Brianstorm' that helped make their name were unashamedly Brit-rock to the core. Then the band hopped over the Atlantic, and forged a new, harder-edged sound with the help of Queens Of The Stone Age's Josh Homme. The band's third album *Humbug* was dark, odd, wide-ranging and the sound of a band spreading its wings. It's a direction they continued to explore with their fourth album *Suck It And See*, with Matt Helders' drumming continuing to develop and impress, and 2012's drum feature 'R U Mine' confirming him as one of the UK's finest young rock drummers.

When *Rhythm* met up with Helders just before the release of *Humbug* in 2009, we found him to be down-to-earth and a great talker on everything from vintage drum kits to his evolving sound.

## *Humbug is a much darker, moodier record than fans might be expecting...*

"It's not even the album we expected to make. We came off tour at the end of 2007 and went and did some recording in January 2008. We intended to start working on this album properly then. It would probably have been pretty heavy because we'd just finished the tour and we were all buzzing and excited. But we stepped back and went, 'Is this going to be the best record we can make at this point?' We decided to sit back and give ourselves some space."

## *The first two albums had come along pretty smartly one after the other, hadn't they?*

"They had. And this time we had no deadline so we made a conscious effort to chill out a bit and try some other things. The first two albums were made quite quickly. Not just in terms of how close together they came, but in terms of how we recorded them. We didn't hang about much. It worked back then, there are no regrets at all. But the chance to make a third one was reason enough not to rush it."

## *Did the writing process stay the same?*

"It's always pretty much Alex doing lyrics and making a start with some chords. But there's no formula with us at all. It's not like commercial pop songwriting – it's a different process. It's all very collaborative. I'm not precious if one of the others suggests a beat. Some songs will even start from a drum beat. Maybe it's inexperience. We'd never done this before we came to the first record, so we just did what we knew how."

## *Josh Homme might seem like an unlikely connection for Arctic Monkeys to have made.*

"We'd only met him a couple of times. We'd played with

Queens Of The Stone Age in Texas once before – they had a date where they wanted a support and they asked us to do it and we were thrilled. Josh had introduced himself to us at a festival originally and it was amazing, we had no idea he'd know who we were or anything. He'd said in interviews that he was interested in collaborating with us as long as it wasn't an obvious thing. So when it came to making plans for the new record, Laurence [Bell, *Domino Records* founder] suggested that Josh might be into the idea of working with us, just to try things out.

"When we actually came to recording with Josh, it was all just an experiment to start with. We thought it'd be great experience, but didn't know anything would end up on the record. We just had some time free and we thought we'd go work with him, and if it didn't work out we could still go and do the record with someone else as planned. But it made such an impression on us that it set the tone for the whole record. Josh would play us stuff and we'd get a moody vibe off it and that's what took us in that direction. We learned a lot about how he records. Alain Johannes [multi-instrumentalist/engineer/producer] engineered with Josh and he was a real factor in the consistency of the record."

## *What was it like for a bunch of very English lads to work with one of American rock's biggest stars?*

"When we actually came down to recording with Josh, it was all just an experiment to start with. We thought it'd be a great experience, but didn't know that anything would end up on the record. We just had some time free and we thought we'd go work with him, and if it didn't work out we could still go and do the record with someone else as planned. But it made such an impression on us that it set the tone for the whole record. Josh would play us stuff and we'd get a moody vibe off it and that's what took us in that direction. We learned a lot about how he records. Alain Johannes [multi-instrumentalist/engineer/producer, QOTSA, eagles Of Death metal, No Doubt, Uncle etc] engineered with Josh and he was a real factor in the consistency of the record."

## *How was that for you as a drummer?*

"It was quite a challenge to live up to. Obviously Josh has worked with some great people, so there was definitely some pressure. But he'd talk to me about how I played and that was a real confidence boost. He wasn't expecting me to be Dave Grohl, so that released all that. I couldn't get away with anything, though."

## *The drums here sound fatter and warmer than on previous records. Was that Josh's influence?*

"Yes, partly. Josh has a very specific way of miking stuff up, even live. They had amazing mics for everything. As far as set-ups were concerned, Alain had a Ludwig Vistalite kit in big sizes which I loved, and there's a

vintage Gretsch kit on there too. To capture everything, we had a lot more ambient mics and they showed me what a difference that made, opening up the chorus with room mics for example. The drum sound was all about being tight and fast back on the first two records, which suited them – but this one needed more space and more warmth."

## *Are you now a vintage drum convert?*

"I've just got a '70s Ludwig which is amazing, actually. I've never used old stuff before, it's always been Premier. I might use it in rehearsals and see how it is. But it's not worth the risk of damaging it. Other than that, like I say, it's always been Premier kits – they even made me my own white sparkle finish. They've treated me very well and they've been very generous."

## *You've always used a pretty simple, unfussy set-up, haven't you?*

"The reason my drums are like that is because I liked the way they looked when I started out. At 16 I set up like Chris Dangerous from The Hives because I loved the look of his kit. I wanted everything flat and low – I got used to it and that's how I still have it. I like 5½" deep snares on stage, partly because I can position them where I want them. Deeper snares come up a bit too high for me sometimes. And I always have 13" and 16" toms, although I've used bigger in the studio. I look silly behind a big kit, even though I like the way big sizes sound. And I'm from the Buddy Rich school of keeping the cymbals low so the crowd can see me!"

## *No one else plays like you, but how do you see your development over the last few years?*

"I'm definitely a better player now. We'd only been playing two years at the first record. We played every day on tour and that really helped. But it was a big leap from first to second record. We're still learning. There's a lot more to do and things to get better at, but I am better now. I don't know 'too much', but I like the limitations it imposes – it makes you more creative and less scientific. Lessons aren't a bad way to learn, but for certain people it's not right, and I believe that if you're creative you can be a great drummer either way." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Arctic Monkeys, Late Night Tales

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Arctic Monkeys *Whatever People Say I Am That's What I'm Not* (2006), Arctic Monkeys *Humbug* (2009), Arctic Monkeys *AM* (2013)





# Nick Mason

As Nick Mason and Pink Floyd celebrated the 40th anniversary of their first release, *Rhythm* spoke to the man that put the space into one of modern music's most spaced-out bands

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**P**ink Floyd were one of Britain's most successful bands of the 1960s and, in effect, of all time. The one member who's been there throughout is drummer Nick Mason. In the early days, Mason was the focal point, pounding his double bass kit, driving long, spacey instrumentals at London freak-outs where the band pioneered the conjunction of light shows with avant-garde rock.

But as the band became massive, Nick inevitably took more of a back seat, selflessly underpinning their slow-burn epics. Playing with such restraint is nothing like as easy as it looks. But, like Ringo in The Beatles, Nick plays for the music and not for his own aggrandisement. The band could easily have bombed following the tragic mental disintegration of original leader Syd Barrett. And when Roger Waters went solo after the band's huge 1970s successes, the odds on Mason and guitarist David Gilmour revitalising the Pink Floyd brand yet again were far from assured. Mason even hocked his prized GTO Ferrari to underwrite massive touring costs. Of course, it all worked out and there was a happy ending when the band, including long-suffering keyboardist Richard Wright, shelved their differences to reunite for 2006's Live 8.

*'Astronomy Domine', from your first album, is typical early Floyd – cosmic art-rock, with you beating out ferocious rhythms...*

"Absolutely, because the reason I'm in a band now was entirely down to Ginger Baker appearing at the Regent Street Polytechnic with a double bass drum Ludwig. I thought, 'Oh yes, that's what I want to be.' And then, of course, Keith Moon. So almost certainly 'Astronomy' was just post Ginger or Keith, because it's wild, almost a constant fill."

*But no one else sounded like that – certainly not Cream, nor The Who...*

"One fortunate thing was that we had almost unlimited studio time. On 'Saucerful Of Secrets' [1968] the cymbal things are almost like drones. We experimented putting mics right on the edge and playing them very lightly, and we might have dipped them into water."

*There are avant-garde and jazz influences...*

"Oh yes, it's a musical journey round the world! To some extent 'Pow R. Toc H.' and 'Set the Controls...' were both mallet pieces influenced by Chico Hamilton from the *Jazz On A Summer's Day* film (1958). He solos with mallets and I thought that was just the cleverest thing I'd ever seen."

*Was having lots of studio time down to The Beatles' lead?*

"Absolutely, they transformed the recording process because EMI realised there was good reason to let these bands have free rein. If they were going to sell loads, why begrudge them studio time? We actually

renegotiated our contract to get smaller royalties and unlimited studio time! For us it really worked. I always say we probably owe The Beatles our existence. They cleared the way for a totally different business: album-led instead of single-led."

*Once Syd went, was it harder to come up with singles? Or was that no longer the intention?*

"No, it was the intention and we did try. Syd had a great natural talent. Without Syd we wouldn't exist, he was the launch pad for the whole thing and led it for the first year. And it was surprising, in a way, when he went, that we somehow managed to carry on long enough to get Roger writing. It was only when the singles failed that we announced we weren't a singles band and would only make albums."

*It seems awful to say, but it didn't seem like Syd was missed...*

"Well no, he wasn't, that's accurate really, because he'd become so weird. It was so difficult to do what we wanted to do. And when he was gone we just really enjoyed ourselves, got our heads down without worrying about this loose cannon. One curious thing, looking back: there was no single thread or direction. You talk about 'spacey' music, starting with 'Astronomy', but we then dropped that. *Ummagumma* and *Atom Heart Mother* wandered off on different paths that we come back from with *Meddle*, the next natural record in the great scheme of things."

*By 1970, while other prog bands were playing millions of notes, you went the opposite way, finding masses of space...*

"Yes, there is a lot of space in Floyd pieces. But there's also a lot of layering. That's one reason we ended up with a particular style. We did lots of overdubbing. We found that was how we liked working."

*Which brought huge success with The Dark Side Of The Moon. Did you feel like everything you'd done before was coming together?*

"I think that probably is the view. It's extraordinary because these things achieve a critical mass and then go ballistic, so you have to try to make sense of quite why it's so popular."

*Your 7/4 beat on 'Money' is not the most obvious, but it works a treat...*

"I've even been accused of playing it wrongly, which is frankly irritating! That beat just seemed to work, and that's how we did it. That's how it always happened up until *The Wall*, where [producer] Bob Ezrin got more involved in the arranging."

*On The Wall's opener, 'In The Flesh', you get a Bonham-esque sound...*

"It's a very live sound. We recorded the drums in a big

open room with hard surfaces, almost a hall, [with a] Ludwig kit and Black Beauty snare. 'Comfortably Numb' is great to play live because of the guitar anthem at the end, which is another free time for the drummer. On a good day you're building the solo with David, always thinking, 'Can I do something different this time?'"

*The Wall had the ultimate stage show...*

"Yes, and again the live show side of us was not a particularly conscious decision. I won't say we wandered into it, but once we started with the light shows it became our signature. We weren't particularly visual performers, so more and more attention got delivered to the staging. It really took off with *The Dark Side...* in 1972/'73, when we actually had a budget to use proper film we could project with enough luminescence to work."

*Momentary Lapse Of Reason has big '80s snare sounds and even session drummers, but by Division Bell you're back to your tight sound, creating space. Could you tell us about this?*

"Absolutely. Some tracks were done with other people simply to expedite the whole thing. I was in the UK and Dave was in America. But when we toured I had to learn all the parts anyway. It was the era of the 'drum doctor', so instead of your own kit you'd have this incredible spread of drums. And everyone was looking for the biggest snare drum ever. That came and went, really, and you ended up with just a really nice-sounding Drum Workshop set."

*At the Live 8 concert in 2006, did you slot together again as a band as comfortably as you appeared to?*

"Yeah, there's a certain amount of intuitive playing because you've worked together for so long. Working with other musicians is great for making it sound right, but they largely do it by learning the part, and if you drift off the part it becomes noticeable. Guy Pratt [bassist] is absolutely brilliant, he's got it down perfectly, but with Roger there's always some chance that you'll both decide to drift from the path of righteousness at the same time... we have special Pink Floyd dispensation!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS

### RELATED ARTISTS:

Pink Floyd

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Pink Floyd

*The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* (1967), *Pink Floyd Atom Heart Mother* (1970), *Pink Floyd Dark Side Of The Moon* (1973), *Pink Floyd The Wall* (1979)







# Steve Gadd

One of the most recorded drummers of all time, during the 1980s Steve Gadd made the idea of the session drummer cool, an artist in his own right...

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**S**teve Gadd introduced a super-precision into recording, almost as if preparing drummers for the arrival of the drum machine and sequenced tracks. Yet despite his clarity of execution he is also the most passionate and deeply groove-orientated drummer. However technically slick his beats, no one could accuse him of lacking soul or groove. He is the favourite of Chick Corea, Eric Clapton and Paul Simon, the one modern drummer singled out by Buddy Rich for "elevating the art of drumming, the one who has the most class behind the drums".

Born in 1945 Gadd was a child drumming prodigy who grew up playing jazz, touring Europe in 1961 as a school band member. In the early '70s he moved to New York City and quickly established himself as the leading session drummer when the recording industry was at its all-time high. Following triple-session days in the studio, he and his fellow session elite grooved the nights away in the NY clubs with Stuff and Gadd's Gang. As well as his own quartet, Gadd And Friends, he has had the monopoly on a handful of major league gigs – notably Paul Simon, James Taylor and Eric Clapton.

*Some might think the Clapton gig an unlikely combination – a hugely skilled American jazz musician with a self-taught UK blues fanatic who's probably never had to read a note?*

"All those things are challenging to me. Eric plays unbelievably. I've always loved the challenge of playing different kinds of music. And he's not kidding around when he plays that stuff – it's the real thing and that is inspiring to me. And it's rewarding and an education to learn how to do that too. These guys are music historians in terms of things that I didn't really dive into. So it has been a great learning experience."

*Eric studied the old Chicago blues guys. Did you study pioneering blues drummers like Fred Below, S P Leary and Odie Payne?*

"No, these guys opened a whole other world for me. I listened to all the original stuff, whatever Eric plays for me. And whatever covers we're doing from the old guys. I listen to it and it's fantastic stuff."

*Presumably your famous shuffles transferred nicely to Eric's blues?*

"Yeah, they do, but I can learn some things to apply to my shuffles from those old things. It's not trying to make the old stuff modern, it's trying to understand what the old stuff was and to really make it a part of me. Not change it, but understand it. So my shuffle could get even more deeply rooted. There are lots of different ways to play a shuffle. And I found that out when I first came on the gig. There were a lot of different songs that were similar but not the same. And to try to differentiate what the heart and soul of the thing was, in terms of what the drummer was doing, was a challenge. You try to keep it interesting."

*Who inspired your shuffles? Were they more from the classic jazz organ trios?*

"Yeah, I got them off guys I heard with Jack McDuff, like Joe Dukes. And unknown guys who used to work with organ groups and be on the road and play a week here, a week there. When I was young my dad would take me to hear organ groups and I'd sit as close as I am to you and watch them. That is how I learned, and it's a great way, being that close. You can really hear and see what's going on. Sometimes they let me sit in."

*You started out playing jazz, then when you came to New York City and the sessions took off, you got into more groove-oriented, funky stuff...*

"Yes, so the industry – the music – was taking me for a ride. And the fact I had my eyes and ears open and I loved all different kinds of things, it improved my musical vocabulary. Just by challenging myself to try and play something that I never played before."

*Some might suggest the music you played early on was highly technical, whereas, for someone of your skill, playing with Eric Clapton and James Taylor is falling off a log?*

"Yeah, but it isn't. Musically it's very challenging. Every situation has its different challenges. There's all kinds of ways to make music. You can use notes, but you can also use silence. And that is just as important a part of music as what you play. It's just as challenging to be able to use space and still be able to keep the thing feeling good."

*Do you ever find yourself in situations where what you play is simply not working and you're stumped?*

"No! I've been in situations where I feel challenged, but not because someone's telling me that I'm not doing it right. More or less I'm in agreement that we got to change something here, but I'm not sure what it is. But that's what you are there for, to figure that stuff out. Sometimes they feel it and I feel it with them at the same time. Sometimes I feel it and they don't – and I say let me try something else and see if this feels better to you. You're constantly trying to get it to where it feels good for the music."

*You seem to be touring more often. Is it because the studio work simply doesn't exist any longer?*

"There's not as much and I don't live in New York anymore. I still do some recording, but the industry is not what it was. So you keep doing what you have to, to keep busy. I enjoy what I do and I'm grateful for the work I get called for. And I've got a great band I put together called Steve Gadd And Friends with Joey De Francesco [organ], Ronnie Cuber [baritone sax] and Paul Bollenback [guitar]. We did a bunch of stuff last year. We did a DVD in Tokyo from the Blue Note – there

are YouTube clips. We recorded the music live in Japan and also at a club in Phoenix. I'm going to listen to that and mix an album to put out so we have some product to sell when that band goes out, which would be a smart thing to do."

*How did your trademark use of the cowbell come about?*

"The cowbell I learned from Don Elias, who showed it to a drummer called Ron Davis, who showed it to me. It was a great pattern and I love it. I just repeated a lot of stuff. I did it in different styles and I switched it from a cowbell to a bell of a cymbal or something. That was in the late '60s when I was in the army. I had leave and I went back to my home town of Rochester and saw Chuck Mangione's band play and Ron was playing that stuff and he showed it to me."

*You mentioned the army, were you drafted?*

"No, I enlisted before I had to show up for the draft and I took an audition for the army field band and I was accepted. I wasn't sure that I was gonna go in, but when I finally got my draft papers I had to because I didn't want to go to Vietnam. There was only a handful of those bands where you were guaranteed to stay in the States. When we got out of basic training they paid us like a sergeant's pay. Most of the guys were music college graduates trying to stay out of the war."

*Do you ever feel jazz is not valued as much as it should be?*

"Well, it is valued to the guys who are doing it. And that has always been a part of what jazz was anyway. Nobody was doing it to get rich. Music was an art form. People did it because they loved to play. It's only been in the last few years where music became like a multi-million dollar industry. That is not where it started out. So I think that there are still people who play from their heart and not for money. I think, because of *American Idol*, there are also people who start out wanting fame and fortune. But it's two separate things. And if you have that love of jazz and you are born with that and that is what you are striving for, then it's not about money. Although maybe one day you might make some, I don't think that is what they're doing it for." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:**  
Steely Dan, Paul Simon,  
Steve Gadd & Friends

**CLASSIC CUTS:**  
Steely Dan *Aja* (1977),

Paul Simon *Still Crazy After All These Years* (1975)





# Chad Smith

The Red Hot Chili Peppers' indomitable sticksman is also a man of many side projects, including the funky Bombastic Meatbats and classic rockers Chickenfoot

WORDS: DAVID WEST/GEOFF NICHOLLS

**T**here's no rest for the wicked and certainly none for Chad Smith. Even when he's not powering the funk rock of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, he keeps his oar in the water and his drumsticks free from cobwebs by playing with classic rockers Chickenfoot (with Joe Satriani, Sammy Hagar and Michael Anthony) and his more straight-up funk outfit The Bombastic Meatbats.

Before the Chilis' triumphant return in 2011 with the well-received *I'm With You*, he worked on Outernational's album and even recorded a children's CD with Dick Van Dyke called *Rhythm Train*. He also popped up on the Grammy-winning *Taking The Long Way* by the Dixie Chicks, and over the years he's maintained his close relationship, professionally and personally, with legendary rock vocalist Glenn Hughes. *Rhythm* caught up with Chad while he was in London for a guest appearance on the drum throne with Hughes at the Astoria in 2008.

## How did you come to be involved with the Dixie Chicks record?

"Through [producer] Rick Rubin. We were doing our record and, as always, Rick's got nine things going at once. I said, 'Hey Rick, what else are you doing these days?' He said, 'Umm, Weezer and Metallica and this new Dixie Chicks record. They want to do more of a Southern rock thing.' I didn't know too much about it other than they were here in London, talked some s\*\*t about Bush and they got in big trouble for it. He said, 'I'm putting the band together, you'd be great, you should come and play.' I said, 'Okay, why not?' After I finished the basic tracks for [*the Chili Peppers' 2006 album*] *Stadium Arcadium*, I went down and played with them and it was really fun. I don't do a lot of session work where I don't know the people, usually it's my friends or somebody that I know. They were great, nice people and very talented, good players. The funny thing was I'm not into competitions for music or awards, music is not about that, but at the Grammy Awards their record was up for album of the year and so was our record, so I was competing against myself! And then the Dixie Chicks won everything. It's a good record. It's a challenge to do different stuff. I try to do other projects that are kind of non-Chili Pepper-esque because obviously I do that all the time. It's good for your playing, it makes you think in different ways and puts you in situations where you have to try to be creative."

## What's the story behind the Bombastic Meatbats?

"It's some friends of mine that I play with from time to time with another guy that I do records with, Glenn Hughes, and Ed Roth and Jeff Kollman, the guitarist and the keyboard player. It's instrumental music, there's no singing and it's a little freer. It's not like jazz or anything. We went and played in Japan and that was

a good time. We're doing it because we like it. It's purely out of love and friendship."

## You've been busy with Glenn Hughes as well...

"He's my buddy, my son's godfather. We just have a good time playing together. I haven't been able to play with him very much because he tours for six weeks at a time. He has a fine English drummer, a friend of mine, Matt Goom, playing with him. We did another record and it's very Glenn. He's singing great, playing bass really good. It's another 'keep me out of trouble' side project."

## How does working with Glenn as a bassist compare to playing with Flea?

"Flea and I have this musical telepathy from playing together for all these years that we don't even talk about. We just do it. With Glenn, he writes his songs on guitar, whereas Flea writes stuff on the bass so [*his stuff is*] more bass oriented. Glenn's bass playing is a little bit different, pretty simple, which I like, but he needs a little more coaxing to come up with interesting things. I don't mean that in a bad way at all. I think it's because he comes from the song-writing aspect of it - he's not really thinking like a bass player. I try to help him come up with interesting melodic things on the bass that maybe he wouldn't normally think of. We come from that same school of that early-'70s rock I grew up on."

## So tell us about Chickenfoot - Joe Satriani's a pretty good guitarist to have on board, isn't he?

"I didn't really know that much about him before, I just knew him as this instrumentalist guy. I thought he was a Steve Vai shredder kind of thing. But he was friends with Sam [Hagar] - they both live up in San Francisco - and Sammy was like, 'Shoot, we got to get someone good, I'll ask Joe.' And we just jammed and it was, wow, this feels good. It's no supergroup or manufactured thing. We all have similar backgrounds. I like classic rock, I grew up on Van Halen and Montrose, the groups those guys were in. And we all like Cream and Zeppelin. Then it was, 'We're gonna get Andy Johns to produce!' How cool is that? The guy who recorded Led Zep IV."

## What about your personal musical journey - where do you want to go next?

"I just want to get better and change and grow and hopefully become a better person and father and husband. All those things will help me be a better musician. I'm really excited about where drumming can go and that's why I like doing drumming shows and playing with other people, trying to get kids to take up the instrument. The main thing I see with young people is they don't want to put the effort and the hard work into what it takes to become accomplished on an instrument. They see something on TV: 'Okay I'll get in a band, I'll play the drums,' and they don't understand the dedication and hard work it takes. There's no

shortcut. If you love something and you're passionate about it, you'll want to play and want to become better. Maybe you'll play with your friends down the pub or maybe you'll get lucky and your band will take off - but do it because you love it."

## What do you get out of your drum clinics?

"It's fun to get real close. We play concerts in big places and you don't get that real one-on-one. I'm very flattered that anyone would want to come and see me. If I could have gone and seen someone I thought was good - Mitch Mitchell, Ginger Baker or Ian Paice, John Bonham or Ringo - without their band, up close, watch them play, talk to them, ask them questions, that would have been great. I would have jumped at that chance. Not to say I'm in that league, but now this is a common thing that people do. Drummers especially really like to do them. No one comes out to the bass clinic, do they? We're kind of weird, but in a good way. I probably have lots of bad habits but if there's something good you can pick out of what I do, I'm all for it."

## How has the dynamic in the Red Hot Chili Peppers changed over the years?

"Musically we still have the same goals - to make new music and change and grow - but we're different people. It would be really boring if we stayed the same and I was acting like I was 25. Now we have families, and your priorities change. That's normal. We're still friends and I see them a lot, but I want to spend time with my family. Musically some of our best stuff is yet to come. We have a special thing. We've changed the chemistry of the band a couple of times. When John Frusciante rejoined for the second time, we were like, 'This is a special chemistry we have, this band of people. For whatever reason, the music we make, people like it, we like it and we can't take that for granted.' I never thought the Chili Peppers would be a band for more than three or four years. It started off as this joke, jumping around with socks on our dicks. We're fortunate to keep going and people still want to see us play and enjoy our records. We're fortunate and we appreciate that." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Red Hot Chili Peppers, Chickenfoot, Bombastic Meatbats, Glenn Hughes, Dixie Chicks

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Red Hot Chili Peppers *Mother's Milk* (1989), Red Hot Chili Peppers *Bloodsugarsexmagik* (1991), Red Hot Chili Peppers *One Hot Minute* (1995), Red Hot Chili Peppers *Californication* (1999), Chickenfoot *Chickenfoot* (2009)





# Nicko McBrain

His galloping grooves and fast right foot have powered one of the world's biggest heavy metal bands, Iron Maiden, for the last 30 years

WORDS: DAVID WEST

**M**ichael Henry 'Nicko' McBrain grew up listening to his father's jazz records and was particularly inspired by seeing Joe Morello performing 'Take Five' with The Dave Brubeck Quartet on TV. Teaching himself to play, Nicko soon found himself falling under the spell of rock'n'roll, thanks to the likes of Ringo Starr, Charlie Watts, Keith Moon and John Bonham. Nicko set about honing his craft, first with covers bands and later with The Streetwalkers, Pat Travers and Trust. Then in 1982 Nicko was invited to replace Clive Burr behind the drums for New Wave Of British Heavy Metal stars Iron Maiden. He was just in time to drum on the album *Piece Of Mind*, and he has masterfully occupied the throne ever since. A drummer's drummer, McBrain loves rubbing shoulders with fellow players at clinics and conventions and sharing his secrets while learning new tricks. He constantly refers to himself as 'old', but in truth there are few drummers with as much joy for life and youthful enthusiasm as this veteran.

## What were you doing while Maiden were recording their first three albums, and were you a fan?

"For crying out loud mate, you're asking me something that was 30-odd years ago! Can you remember what you were doing 30 years ago? I was playing in a band called Trust for a couple of years. As for listening to Maiden, no. I knew of the band because Trust played on the *Killers* tour with them in England. I was familiar with the band's music but I didn't have their albums at home. I knew them all as mates from playing with them when I was with Trust. Then Bruce joined and Maiden came out to France and Germany when Trust supported them yet again for nine shows. At one stage, Maiden opened for Trust at a gig in France, which was quite weird. I was listening to the old stuff that I still listen to now, like Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. When I was playing *[on a bill]* with Maiden I got into them in a big way. I'd watch them from the side of the stage. That was the old Mark IV Maiden, with Paul DiAnno, Adrian Smith and Dennis Stratton. We became very close friends. I did a gig with them, which was their very first European date, in Belgium. I was playing in a band called McKitty. We were on the same bill. That was when Steve *[Harris]* first saw me playing. He was impressed and he remembered me when they were looking for a new drummer. That was probably 1979."

## What do you think of Clive Burr's playing?

"A great drummer. I always loved his playing. We got on very well drummer to drummer but also as mates. He really had a nice flair. We were just young kids jamming out and playing rock'n'roll. He would hit really hard, and I like that. We became very close. I've always respected and loved his playing, and it saddens my heart that he got too sick to be able to play. I know how much he misses it. It's very hard to have an illness that

debilitates you to that extent, where you can't do the things you love the most in life. We've helped give him a better quality of life with the trust we set up for him, but it's not the same. When I see him in the wheelchair, I always say, 'You ready to have a go?' I know the answer's going to be no, but you never know when he's going to be well enough to have a knock. It's so hard and I love him very dearly."

## Can you remember how you were asked to join?

"In the middle of 1982 I had just finished a tour of France with Trust, after which I was actually let go from that band. They didn't pay me for the work that I finished. Nothing new there. I was sitting at home, and I got this phone call from *[Maiden manager]* Rod Smallwood. Clive wasn't doing so well and they asked if I'd consider joining the band. I remember that I was on the phone with Rod for close to an hour, asking him what was going on with Clive. He was explaining things to me and I was defending Clive. Finally, Rod turned round and said, 'Do you f\*\*\*ing want this gig or not?' Of course I did, but I didn't want it under shady conditions. I was then put on a retainer, because they were gonna have a word with Clive. Clive shaped up and got himself back into the band, so I was told that I wasn't required, and they paid me a month's severance. A couple of weeks later I got another call because Clive had taken a nosedive again, and I was put back on a retainer. This happened all the way until June of 1982, when they finished their *Number Of The Beast* tour. That same situation happened three times. It was the third time when things didn't work out for Clive."

## Listening back, how do you rate *Piece Of Mind*, your first album with the band?

"It's brilliant. I was listening to a couple of tracks the other day because a radio station was playing it, and I'm not happy with the drum sound but at the time I loved it. I wasn't overly impressed by the production, by today's standards, but it's 25 years old. 'Where Eagles Dare' is a great track. It's an absolutely phenomenal record. Up until *A Matter Of Life And Death* I would have said that *Piece Of Mind* was my favourite album with Maiden, because it was my first. Being involved with video making and one thing or another - I was thrown into a mega rock star band. The record will always have a special place in my heart, because that was when I began to live with the band. The courtship was in rehearsals, and getting married was the album. Of course, the sex was the music. And don't get me wrong - don't even think that I'm gay because I'll come round and have a word. We had a couple of divorces along the way. We've had our ups and downs, but no really bad downs."

## How do you view the Blaze Bayley era now?

"That was a very interesting period because it took us in a slightly different direction, only because Blaze's

vocal range was different to Bruce's, so songs were written in different keys for him. There were two wonderful albums and some very good songs came out of that era. Live-wise, there are some bad memories because some of the gigs didn't cut it in terms of how Blaze performed. We've all been in that situation where one of us isn't on top, but when you're the frontman, there's no hiding place. As the drummer, I've got my bass player Harry. If I f\*\*\*k up, he's there to cover for me, and vice versa. It's very rare we make a mistake at the same time. Towards the end with Blaze, I was getting disheartened. Overall though, the memories of those four years are superb. I loved Blaze like a brother. He was so passionate about Maiden and living the life, but sometimes it was just too much for him."

## With Blaze, I saw you playing at a relatively small venue, Nottingham Rock City. Did you ever think you'd be back playing stadiums?

"That was interesting. Sometimes, we get more nervous playing a smaller venue than we do playing the stadiums. We get nervous all the time. If you don't get those butterflies, I think it's time to hang it up because you don't have the passion. We did the smaller places, and sometimes it was really nerve-wracking, playing to 400 kids. We downsized to a degree. We played the bigger venues too, but more the smaller clubs, especially in America. It didn't really bother us. As long as we have a stage and a few lights so we can see where we're going, we'll play anywhere. There are no airs and graces with this band."

## Do you think drummers ever stop learning?

"Absolutely not. I've learned stuff from my son. It's just a different way of doing something, and I love that. The camaraderie in drumming is like chivalry in the air during the First World War. Drummers love to tell other drummers how to do s\*\*t. I've known guitar players who won't even tell you how they turn their amps on. There's a fraternity with drummers. You start talking to each other, and the next thing you know you're working a drum part out together. A friend of mine once told me that I remind him of Buddy Rich. He saw another colour to me. I would never say that there's any Rich in my playing, but he saw that." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Iron Maiden, Trust, Pat Travers, The Streetwalkers

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Iron Maiden *Piece Of Mind* (1983),

Iron Maiden *Powerslave* (1984), Iron Maiden

*Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son* (1988), Iron

Maiden *A Matter Of Life And Death* (2006)





# Questlove

He put live drum beats into hip-hop and helped kick-start the neo soul movement, and now Questlove is one of the world's most in-demand drummer/producers

WORDS: JON COHAN

**A**dmir Thompson, aka Questlove of critically acclaimed 'live' hip-hop band The Roots, has forged a career as one of the world's most in-demand producers and drummers. Over the course of an incredible 10 Roots studio albums and a heap of Grammy nominations, Questlove has helped to broaden the musical scope of hip-hop with his brilliant live drum grooves. The Roots also backed R&B singer Betty Wright and John Legend on recent albums, and in 2009 Questlove and co got to be house band on *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon*.

On top of all that, Questlove helped kick-start the neo soul movement, working with the likes of D'Angelo, with whom he was playing when *Rhythm* met him back in 2004.

*Seeing you perform live, I could have sworn you were leaning behind the beat...*

"Oh yeah, that's my trademark. That's how Frank [Knuckles, Roots percussionist] and I talk to each other. A lot of that is Voodoo Withdraw..."

**Voodoo Withdraw?**

"Yeah, because D'Angelo wanted us to patch the envelope by dragging the envelope through the mud. He'll look at me onstage and yell 'Mud!' and wants mud, he wants it dirty and sloppy. Sloppily in the pocket."

*Is there an interplay between the bass and you and the percussionist to ensure that it stays behind but doesn't drag?*

"I'm the time-keeper guy. I won't play those games with [Roots' bassist] Hub, because Hub is a more traditional bass player who doesn't necessarily speak that language. Like I can't force everyone to learn Greek overnight, so sometimes I know what I can get away with. Like Kirk, our guitar player can absolutely read my mind. It's good that not everyone plays like they're drunk, otherwise it would be a crazy chaotic world all the time."

*Most of the guys from James Brown's band and Motown and Chess Records played with traditional grip...*

"They did, and they played light. You really are forced to do that. That's one of the biggest misconceptions drummers have when they're trying to recreate break beats: they think they have to sound like King Kong or John Bonham. That's cool for Zeppelin, but for soul music I'm almost certain that because of the massive compression used in the boards back then that drummers were often told to play really lightly. As a result, on most of the new record the compression was so hot I could put a big cotton ball on the snare and it would sound like John Bonham. It would defeat the purpose for me to play hard, so playing soft and playing traditional grip got me through songs like 'Boom!'"

*It's interesting that you are an analogue freak and play live drums – and yet you are nevertheless willing to go to great lengths and use digital effects to get the sound you want. It's a lot of work...*

"It is and I suppose I could just take four bars and loop it and do some trickery, but I like to do the whole beat. I'm like that guy that has been on *Oprah* – he goes around and tries to figure out secret recipes of popular foods, like the Big Mac, and then makes it from scratch in his kitchen. I guess that's what I do – I take a Big Mac and close my eyes and try to get everything just right with the ingredients. I do it for sport really."

"It's funny because a lot of engineers will try to make funk drums sound like The Brand New Heavies. Nothing against them, but no sir, I want my drums to sound gut-bucket dirty."

*Some of the stuff you did with D'Angelo, like 'Untitled' for instance, has a very loose feel to it.*

"The sound of neo soul is like jazz instruments, but played in a very soulful way. I guess the thing that makes it distinctive are the sloppy drums that are underneath it all – that is a very important element. For me sloppy drums are something to aspire to. I don't mean sloppy in a bad way, but so there is some human feeling to it. Coming from Philly, a lot of drummers were very big on laying the cleanest rolls they could pull off and all that stuff. To go from that just to being absolutely naked – that's a very risky thing to do. Thank God people have discovered the soul of the music, and that's what comes through. And even though I gave up flashiness, I sort of maintained the soul of it that still sounds good."

*The Roots were seen as something of a novelty when you started out, but over the years you have gained credibility and mainstream acts like Jay Z and Eminem have asked you to back them. Do you think younger hip-hop acts have been influenced to incorporate a live band into their music?*

"Yeah, I see the influence of it. Recently MOP [rap duo *Mash Out Posse*] just got a hard rock band. To me MOP are one of the heaviest hip-hop acts ever, and the fact that they now have a band turns their period into an exclamation point. So that's some direct influence there, I think. As far as influence goes though, I just don't want everyone to play follow-the-leader. I want people to understand how music is supposed to be used in hip-hop."

"Hip-hop is still a very disposable culture and because ageism plays a big role in it, a lot of younger cats don't feel the older cats have anything to offer. I just came back from Cuba and a lot of the younger cats were saying, 'Man, these old guys don't understand our ways, they don't understand hip-hop.' I started

rapping to them and was like, 'Yo man, there's a lot of cats in the States who would love to be working with this old-school Cuban stuff – this is what you need to be up on, instead of trying to emulate what you downloaded on the internet. Right here you could have the old cats do a sort of Buena Vista Social Club thing and then mix that with hip-hop. That's what I would do.' Once I explained it like that they started opening up their eyes and ears and absorbing what I was telling them about true mixing and the fact that you can take something old and make something new out of it. That to me is the science of hip-hop culture – how to utilize something from the past and make something new. It's not about having a good marketing angle: 'Oh man, let's just get a band and we'll have an angle.' No, it's about mixing what came before with what will be after."

*Do you think that the disposable nature of hip-hop has actually made it more difficult for people to break away from the tried and true?*

"Yeah you're always going to have people who are averse to something new, as I suppose jazzers are averse to something new, as I suppose jazz purists were adversarial to Miles Davis creating *On The Corner* and *Bitches Brew*. I mean there were people who weren't open to hearing Public Enemy. I remember playing the second Public Enemy album to a bunch of John Scofield and Mahavishnu purists and they just went, 'Ah! What is this crap?!' I laughed and said, 'Man, how are you gonna listen to *On The Corner* and not see the hip-hop equivalent to that record?'"

"It's cool though – as long as I'm not close-minded. Not saying that I'm indifferent to it. You don't have to like everything but you should absorb it and don't shut it off."

*So, if you could have your choice of absolutely anybody in the world to work with, who would it be?*

"I would have to say Stevie Wonder – but only if he let me do it my way with the production and engineering. I would put Stevie right back where he used to be – away from technology and more into musicianship." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:** The Roots, D'Angelo, John Legend  
**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Roots *Phrenology* (2002), *The Roots Things Fall Apart* (1999), *The Roots Undun* (2011), John Legend *Wake Up!* (2010)





# Stanton Moore

From the cosmic funk of Galactic to heavy metal with Corrosion Of Conformity, New Orleans funk master Stanton Moore brings the sound of the Big Easy into the 21st Century

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**B**uilding on a drumming culture which stretches all the way back to Baby Dodds, Stanton Moore brings New Orleans street beats into the 21st Century, mixing vintage drums with digital loops. There is a special verve that shines through in his playing, live and on record, and he has a unique sound – the crucial test of any musician.

Whether it's on his solo albums or with New Orleans cosmic funksters Galactic, the band who first brought him to our attention, Moore's distinctive New Orleans beats, his crackling snare drum and his warm, funky bass drum are ever-present. His use of vintage Gretsch drums betrays his old school funk and jazz sensibility, but as befits a modern voice, he adds a decidedly 21st Century slant to the oldest of beats. He unites his extraordinary set-up of drums and percussion with loops and electronic effects. This delicious cocktail adds up to one of modern drumming's most original voices.

Stanton's mother took him along to Mardi Gras parades from the age of three and he soon became besotted with the drums. By five he was banging the Tupperware, encouraged by his trumpeter father. Deciding to get serious he chose his high school so that he could learn from Marty Hurley, "the world renowned rudimental instructor who ran by far the best drum line in New Orleans". And by high school he'd sought out New Orleans legend Johnny Vidacovich.

*Stanton, you have that extravagant rolling New Orleans snare drum style which Johnny Vidacovich is famed for.*

"I'd seen him playing around. There was this cool thing called the Young People's Jazz Forum at Tipitina's on Sundays and they had this trio with Vidacovich on drums. They played three tunes and then let us kids play. Every week I'd get to play jazz standards and then have a lesson from Johnny. Then I went to Loyola School of Music and he taught there. I'd just got out of the rudimental thing. I had some hand stuff but no real groove or musical sensibility yet and that was what Johnny helped me with. We'd pick a song, he would play the melody and I would play along. He'd solo over a chorus and then I'd do it, trading out. That really helped me loosen up, I was so tight at the time, in the '80s. Everyone was trying to play with perfect time, quantised notes and click tracks and Johnny helped to steer me in a more organic direction. It took me a long time to maintain what I had learned rudimentally but loosen it up. One thing that helped was, I realised that to play the fast ride pattern it was easier if I used the fulcrum between middle finger and thumb. Later I noticed that John Bonham did the same thing. It leaves so much space in the palm. The openness and bigness of Bonham's sound has a lot to do with that loose grip."

*To play in the New Orleans style of funk, you somehow have to loosen it all up.*

"Yeah, it's a New Orleans thing. My whole thing was to

try to do something different. So when Johnny showed me his stickings I thought, 'Wow, that's really hip,' and then I started to see what I could do with it. And I thought if you take a David Garibaldi groove, slow it down and play in between straight and swung, change the accents and improvise over it, and let all these variations happen, you start to come up with something unique."

*I have to ask, in the background of your DVDs there are loads of fabulous old drums, mostly round-badgered Gretschs. Are they all yours?*

"Yeah, except the one Ringo [Ludwig] kit. I want to get some more Ludwigs. I have three Ludwig snare drums – one is the first drum I ever had. But I really got into the Gretsch thing."

*Because of the jazz connection?*

"Yeah. Zig [Zigaboo Modeliste] played Gretsch and Idris Muhammed and Elvin [Jones] and all those guys. So to me it was a connoisseur's drum and once I started playing them I didn't want to play anything else, because that was the sound I was hearing in my head, on all those records. I really dug the jazz sensibility in funk. And once I started to listen to Idris Muhammed and Johnny and even Zig – and definitely the James Brown drummers – they had a jazz sensibility too. When Jabo Starks plays the hi-hat he's basically playing the jazz ride pattern. I got the chance to sit down with him at dinner and he said not many people get that, but to me it's blatantly obvious."

*You've uniquely extended your own set-up...*

"I started playing a small kit, 18", 12", 14" and then by experimenting and creating loops I realised it sounded good when I added this little snare. I had a buddy who was using a pandeiro, playing it by hand. So I got one from LP and put it on my left, because I was already experimenting with cowbells on the left. Then I got the vintage 1942 26" bass drum – that's a story in itself."

*When you go from your small bass drum to the 26" bass drum it completely changes the vibe. You're doing acoustically what people often do electronically in, say, drum'n'bass.*

"Well I originally started using the big drum in parades. Then I thought, what if I put a pedal on it? I started making loops which sounded amazing, especially playing that bass drum and a really ringy snare and then over-compressing it and it sounds as though it's coming through the amplifier of God – killing! Then I thought, 'Hang on, what if I set this up as a remote?'"

"I used that drum on the Corrosion Of Conformity record [In The Arms Of God, 2005] which is heavy metal. I grew up listening to Sabbath and Zeppelin so to me it's only natural. People are going, 'Woah, you did a heavy metal record!' But to me, okay, it's heavy as all hell, but it's basically taking the heaviest I play with

Galactic and extending it for a full set. I went out on the road with them for 10 dates."

*In total contrast to Corrosion Of Conformity, your Garage A Trois album is full of elegant world music grooves.*

"To me it's some of the coolest drumming I have ever done. It's all acoustic, no loops. There might be one backbeat tune, but on everything else the goal was to create without relying on grooves that already existed – totally groove without a backbeat."

*And working with percussionist Mike Dillon you get even deeper grooves than usual. It is often hard to know who's playing what.*

"The whole mindset was to try to develop hybrid grooves drawn from different areas, some from New Orleans, Brazil, West Africa. 'Merpati' is one of the closest to a pre-existing groove, quasi Afro-Cuban. Mike's impressive in that he does tabla and congas and mallets – marimba and vibes. Very few percussionists are happening on all those instruments, each one is a lifetime's study."

*You use lots of percussion too...*

"On 'The Machine' I took a small headed tambourine and turned it upside down on the drum to get that smacky jingle thing. On 'Merpati' it's those Vic Firth Rutes. On 'Circus' there are lots of toms, it sounds like several drummers, but there are no overdubs."

*And you've come a long way with Galactic.*

"When Galactic started we would play for 10 people but they were so into it because it was totally danceable and infectious. What keeps them coming back is that these rhythms are incredibly danceable. We mess with the sound, running things through amplifiers and effects, make it sonically interesting, but danceable. If it's a loop of me it's still me. A lot of people are doing this, but not with New Orleans rhythms."

*You mixed the old and new and created something different.*

"Yeah, well hopefully! When I started playing I really wanted to do things that hadn't been done before and hopefully have it catch on with other people. So it's very flattering to hear that. It's what I set out to do." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Galactic, Stanton Moore Trio

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Galactic Ruckus (2003),

Stanton Moore Groove

Alchemy (DVD, 2010)







# Billy Cobham

Pioneering jazz/rock fusion drummer whose work with Miles Davis and the Mahavishnu Orchestra and on his own *Spectrum* album has been massively influential

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**B**illy Cobham exploded onto the international scene with the Mahavishnu Orchestra in 1971. Along with Tony Williams, Cobham took drumming in new directions, leading the fusion of jazz technique and improvisational ability with rock power and a youthful, cool image. These guys were hip, inventive and blisteringly skilful. Cobham was not only a master jazz drummer – on going solo with 1973's *Spectrum* he proved to be just about the funkier drummer alive too.

Billy influenced rock drummers as much as jazz drummers. He extended the drum kit with double kicks and multiple toms, mounted 'gong' bass drum, pitched Octobans and upturned China trash-crash/ride. He'd long mastered open-handed playing, leading with his left hand, so eliminating the need to crossover to the hi-hat. And he was a pioneer with both synthetic shell Fibes and North drums, and electronic percussion and triggering. In 1980 Billy left the USA, taking up residence in Switzerland, since when he has continued to record prolifically as leader and collaborator. In 1993 he began a long association with WOMAD, spearheading numerous world music projects, while simultaneously keeping up his straighter jazz profile.

## *Did you always know that you would become a musician?*

"Not before I was around six. It was trying to find something your friends respect you for and it turned out that music was it. That and baseball. And I felt more comfortable with music than baseball – it has a more lasting effect."

## *After joining the military and instructing at the military school of music, you went straight onto the New York jazz and session scene.*

"Yeah, I was lucky working with Horace Silver. Straight out of the army the first major project was recording for George Benson – *Giblet Gravy* on Verve. After that came Kenny Burrell. That was on recommendation from musicians who'd worked with me while I was still in the service – Ron Carter, Hubert Laws and Jimmy Owens. They were older and already established and it was really special because the New York scene was extremely competitive and for them to make a recommendation it was clear they knew, no matter what, I could do this. They were putting their own situation on the line to support me."

## *How would you describe your playing at the time?*

"There were certain basic things that I did then that I do today, which is listen to people, be musically observant, try not to overplay, to impose my ideas on the people who were paying me, but as much as possible to accomplish their ideas based on what I was told to do. If I could do that the chances are I could work!"

## *That's a modest, pragmatic approach, but within a couple of years you were blowing everyone away with the Mahavishnu Orchestra...*

"We were all searching at that point. One of the main proponents was John McLaughlin – his will to test the waters, to combine different things, was a big plus for music. The result was we did things we never thought we would. For me I wasn't thinking any more than trying to do the best I could to keep my job! And to try some different things, not knowing where they were going to go. But I was good with that. It told me that hey, if it doesn't work we can always do something else, no big deal. And in the process we don't lose anything, we gain knowledge."

## *It did work though, didn't it? There was a period when some of the greatest jazz musicians in the world were more like rock musicians – Miles and Tony Williams, McLaughlin and you.*

"Jazz was influencing rock at that time. It's only if you do it you know what works or what doesn't for you. But it might be that some three-year-old subconsciously files it away and 20 years later you got a different spin. And you go, 'I remember when I tried that and it didn't work, but now I understand that it can.' And that is what it's all about."

## *You also extended the drum kit and gave credence to the newly emerging Japanese companies, specifically Tama.*

"They asked me to visit them in Japan. I wish I'd been more mature, to understand the importance of being invited to take part in the development of the equipment. But I didn't have the experience then and I missed a golden opportunity to contribute more. I was not asked really to do more than play on certain drums so they could listen and make their decisions. I had a strong enough name to attract a public, so that was all they were interested in. Once I was past my usefulness they replaced me with a curly blond-haired young man by the name of Simon Phillips who played the same combination of equipment as me. But that's a business decision and nothing personal. I waited a few years before working with Mapex. They invited me to Taiwan and it was more interesting because they asked me which drums I would recommend they promote and they hit me with endless different snare drums and shells. I said I like this sound or that sound. They waited six or seven years before they gave me my 'pink slip' and found other drummers that seemed to get them to another level."

## *Then you settled with Yamaha?*

"Around 1997. Things were changing and one of the most important things Yamaha could provide was a consistently good-sounding kit pretty much anywhere."

It's all about having equipment I could depend on to express myself consistently as I go on pioneering regions that, generally speaking, other artists could not. With Yamaha's help I could do this. We get great acknowledgment and major gains in terms of what we learn from other cultures. We take away more than we give. Having the equipment in certain parts of the world was more important to me than how many clinics I did and how much money I made. And Yamaha has gone beyond providing in what would be considered remote places. Like on Lake Baikal in the deepest part of Russia, and that is FAR away! And that's a hats-off to Yamaha."

## *I remember seeing you at Hammersmith Apollo with a room-sized synth!*

"Oh yeah, 1975, the Moog System 55 patchable – what a mess! But we had to see if it worked. When it did, it was like, 'Oh my, how can we package this in a small box?' and now we have it, in the guise of a Mac laptop, Logic and Sibelius. You can see visually what I play, read the music as I play it. I can trigger lighting from there, when I solo I can play patterns that will stimulate other sounds."

## *Back in 2000 you talked about retiring from live playing...*

"It's a great shot in the arm, mentally. Being involved with WOMAD has given me the opportunity to open up to other people and hear what the rest of the world is doing and not just to focus on the music of North America and think, 'Wow, I wish I could be over there to do this.' Well that's nice, but when I come back to New York or Detroit and go to Northern California I sell out venues based on the fact that what I have to offer is quite different from what is expected on many levels. So I can play with a jazz band with Randy Brecker and Kenny Barron and make a presentation of my music that otherwise would not be heard. And the next week, with my Spectrum band – my music again – but more rock-oriented. I'm not just somebody you can roll out of bed and come check out [*lightly*]. So when people do come they know that what I have to offer is unique, and that to me is the biggest compliment in the world." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

**Billy Cobham, Miles Davis, Mahavishnu Orchestra, George Benson**

### CLASSIC CUTS:

**Miles Davis** *A Tribute To Jack Johnson* (1971), **Mahavishnu Orchestra** *Birds Of Fire* (1972), **Billy Cobham** *Spectrum* (1973)





# Simon Phillips

It takes a very special talent to replace Keith Moon in The Who and Jeff Porcaro in Toto. Simon Phillips, the most talented British drummer of his generation, did both...

WORDS: GEOFF NICHOLLS

**W**hen Toto's Jeff Porcaro died suddenly in 1992, the celebrated American rock band were faced with filling the gap left by a drummer many consider the ultimate groovemaster. Britain's Simon Phillips was perhaps not the most obvious candidate. At the time he was tearing up the international clinic circuit, a fusion drummer rattling off double-cannon bass drums with blinding chops, the seeming opposite of Porcaro's smooth understatement. Simon got the nod, however, and made the job his own.

A child prodigy, Simon was playing full-time with his bandleader father Sid Phillips by the age of 12. He left the band to take over the drum chair in *Jesus Christ Superstar* at 16 and quickly graduated to the London session scene. Word of mouth led to him balancing sessions with Roxy Music, 10cc, Whitesnake, Peter Gabriel, The Human League, Mick Jagger, Robert Palmer and Mike Oldfield alongside heavyweight jazz-rock touring with Jack Bruce, Jeff Beck, Stanley Clarke and Al Di Meola. Recording with Pete Townshend led to a dream gig touring with The Who.

Upon relocating to LA, Simon pursued a second career as engineer/producer alongside the gig he has now held with Toto for 20 years. Toto have won five Grammys, sold more than 30 million albums and have the most dedicated of fans. Songs such as 'Rosanna' and 'Hold The Line' are timeless classics. Bobby Kimball's distinctive vocals and the band's rich vocal harmonies are a trademark, while Steve Lukather is one of the world's greatest guitarists. *Rhythm* spoke to Simon in 2006, as the band were on the British leg of a world tour. Despite Toto's pedigree, like so many vintage acts they found themselves self-financing and producing their 2006 album *Falling In Between*, which they recorded and engineered in Simon's own studio.

## *Simon, I gather you had a major hand in shaping the new record.*

"I was the recording engineer and the Pro-Tools operator. We did a previous album at my house which got the band into recording in the modern way, using Pro-Tools. We had to do the last album on a low budget so I offered to do it. People know me as a drummer, but I've been engineering professionally since 1983. And I learned the old fashioned way, using 'real' gear.

"I've been dealing with the band's technical side for quite a few years now so they kind of had confidence, knew it would be alright. We started out writing there because we wanted to do a band-written album and it was our own production, we were financing it. I was engineering, operating Pro-Tools, playing and writing. The only difference was I wasn't making the tea and moving amps around."

## *It's a massive, in-your-face sound.*

"I just used good old fashioned British engineering and the Glyn Johns approach to the balance, a kind of old

Stones, Led Zeppelin sound. We put stuff down for two weeks. Everybody just dug it and I was fine doing the demos, but I didn't want to engineer the actual record. I tend to do too much and get overstretched. But everyone said, 'We're loving it, will you do it?'"

## *I would imagine you're playing and then suddenly there's a technical problem and you have to stop and change hats?*

"Well I've been doing it for a long time. While I'm playing I'm only concentrating half on drumming. I can hear in the phones what's going on and be thinking, 'Must make sure the piano's balanced,' or 'The bass sounds like it's over limiting.' Anyway we started and I wanted to capture the band the way it plays on stage. We've been criticised for being way too slick in the studio, everything's a little too tight, done to a click and usually in one or two takes. I don't think that's good enough for this band. It's okay for sessions and because we've all played on thousands of records that's kind of the attitude we use to record our own albums, and I think it's wrong. I wanted us to play without a click and do loads of takes. So 'Falling In Between', the title song, was one of the first we recorded and there's no click. It goes through different meter changes, dynamics, and it's a complete take, no edits. I had the band play it seven or eight times, by which time Luke was ready to throw his guitar away. I said, 'Okay guys, go home, come back tomorrow, we'll do it again'. That didn't receive a good response either! I stayed and listened and I knew exactly which take was the one. And they came in the next day and oh boy, talk about grumpy: 'Why do we have to do this? Why don't we just drop in and repair our parts?' I said, 'No, we're going to play it again.' So we played it twice and it was dreadful, no life. So, they were getting a cup of tea and I said to my assistant, 'Play take number five,' and the band were going, 'What's this? It's great, that's the take.' And it is."

## *Turning to your concert, I loved the acoustic jazzy intro to 'Rosanna'...*

"Nice, eh? I'd been thinking about that a while. So I grabbed Greg [Philliganes] and said I wanted to totally re-harmonise the beginning of 'Rosanna' and do it as part of the acoustic set, start it off really small. He said, 'Yeah, right,' and after half-an-hour he said, 'Sing the melody,' and he started playing that intro. We played it to Luke and he loved it."

## *Although you show incredible technique in your solo, you always play for the song.*

"I guess it first comes from playing with my dad. His whole thing was you play the music. You had to read his charts precisely, scope for embellishment was limited. In its own way that was good, very disciplined."

## *This was playing Dixieland?*

"Straight-ahead trad, swing and Dixieland. Pretty much

fours on the kick, no bebop. I absolutely couldn't do it now, but it got me playing in a musical way from the start and I guess that's why I worked out on sessions from an early age because I had that discipline to play in a studio consistently and not to overplay the song."

## *You started really early.*

"I joined my dad's band properly when I was 12. But I sat in with them from eight onwards and I have a recording of me with his band, aged six, at the Aeolian Hall for the BBC. The song was 'Sugar Foot Stomp'. It's hilarious when I listen to it now, but when I see six-year-olds walking about I think, 'How did I do that?' Then when I see 12-year-olds, to think I was on the bus with eight or nine other musicians, the youngest was 30, doing four-hour shows, reading charts at that age."

## *Presumably you changed to the open-armed, left-hand lead approach later?*

"I was always fascinated by playing left-handed, mainly because of my kit with four toms across the top. I'd seen a drummer play like that, funnily enough at Heathrow Airport. My dad used to do an annual dance there for the ground staff. It was the most hilarious gig because we played this canteen area stuck at the end of a runway and every 20 minutes a plane would take off and down the band out. The support band drummer was playing left-handed on a right-handed kit. I thought it was ugly at the time. Then years later I thought about it. And then I went to see Billy Cobham playing at the Rainbow in 1974 and I went, 'Oh wow, okay.' Then I saw Lenny White. I sat right behind him and I thought, 'I've got to play that way'. I swapped over and suddenly I could set up where I wanted."

## *Have you never regretted moving to LA?*

"I never felt very at home here [England]. From 1979 onwards I used to travel a lot to the States, Europe and Japan. The '70s were the heyday - three sessions a day, two drum kits, leap-frogging round the studios. Once it got to 1980 I started to do a different type of work and I guess I tried to get more into production. So when it was time to make the break I never regretted it. I miss three things. First, my mum. Then cricket, because I used to play. And motor racing. It's easier to race in Britain, the distances are too great in the USA." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Toto, The Who, Jeff Beck, Derek Sherinian

**CLASSIC CUTS:** Jeff Beck, *There And Back* (1980), Steve

Lukather *Candyman* (1993), Derek Sherinian *Black Utopia* (2003)





**TAMA®**



# Stephen Perkins

Hollywood rockers Jane's Addiction may have only released four albums in four decades, but the tribal-influenced drumming of Stephen Perkins has helped make each one a classic

WORDS: RICH CHAMBERLAIN

**W**e were in a great space to reinvent Jane's Addiction," says drummer Stephen Perkins, explaining the band's most recent album *The Great Escape Artist*. "It's our fourth studio record in 25 years. We like to take our time and make really important choices."

The album comes eight years after its predecessor, *Strays* and more than 20 since previous release *Ritual De Lo Habitual*. Perkins revealed all to *Rhythm* about his sporadic career with the alt-rock icons and his love of tribal beats and Venice Beach drum circles.

## What was your attitude to drumming in the early days?

"My first love was jazz drumming and a jazz drummer had a lot to say, lyrically. He'd take cues off the sax solo and the piano rhythm. When Motown hit there was more of a clock and a pulse and I appreciate that. You can hear when the Stones came out and The Beatles that they were doing Motown songs. Later you started hearing songwriting coming out of the drummer, with Charlie Watts, Ringo and Mitch Mitchell. Then when the '80s came it became more of a clock again. I always wanted to take drums into a lyrical, more emotional existence. People can still bounce against my beat but it doesn't have to be two-four, two-four all the time."

## How about going in to record the album?

"When I was looking at the new record and talking to the guys before we even started to make new music, we said let's take everything that's happened to us in 20 years. Growing up it was jazz and rock but now I can put my finger on techno music, drum'n'bass, hip-hop, great drum parts being written with fingers on an iPad and drummers trying to replicate that. They don't even have to mike their drums or EQ the drums, it's already in there."

## Was that electronic approach a big influence?

"I wanted to get influenced by that, but I didn't want to follow a trend. I didn't want to put 808 bass drum sounds in just because they were available. Why do they serve the song? What makes it important at that moment? Today there's such a full frequency from high to low. When Jane's made *Nothing's Shocking* and *Ritual...* some of the highs and lows weren't even there yet - a lot of the 808 sounds and a lot of the twinkly top sounds. So I want to take those influences and not just use them for the sake that they're there. It was really about choices, what's my choice for each part? What's the key of the song? Let's tune the snare, let's tune the kick. Besides the rhythm of the bass line and the guitar part, what's the phrasing of the lyrics? What are the lyrics about? If he's talking about f\*\*king I wanna know, and then I can put that into my drumming. If he's talking about death and war I wanna know about that. I take all of those ideas before I even sit at the kit: full frequency sounds, lyrical content, phrasing of the bass.

I grew up with Navarro so I'm really drawn to the guitar when writing a drum part, the guitar riff and how I play against that and bring that to life."

## So a lot of thought goes into your drum parts.

"I think I have to acknowledge that my drumming should change from influence and environment. Porno For Pyros [Perkins band with Jane's Perry Farrell] wrote all of their songs on surf trips - Tahiti and Bali and Fiji, and you can hear that in the music. With Jane's first few records it was Hollywood. We were hungry, broke, living with prostitutes. It all goes into the sound. So what's going on today? I've got a wife, a kid, I've got a big pie and Jane's is just a slice. But all of those other pieces of the pie need to go into my playing as well. I'm very selective with my parts and what exactly brought life to each part and why."

## What input did the rest of the band have on your playing on this album?

"With three frustrated drummers in the band they've all got drum part ideas, which is cool because they're not drummers so it almost makes it an odd amateur idea, like, 'Hey, you should put the bass drum there.' Well, I'd never have thought of that, okay. Maybe that's not where it should be but it might lead me somewhere. I'm really open-minded, I'm not afraid of someone sitting down with a drum machine and I'll take that to the kit or interpret it. There was a great moment with Dave Sitek [Jane's studio bass player] where he asked what I would do with a song and I played my part and then I said, 'What would you do if you were on a drum machine?' and he came up with a part and I said, 'Wow, let's make a marriage.' Being open-minded and aware of full frequency really can lead you to a sensitive drum part, an organic drum part and also an original part. It's hard to be an original drummer. You get a lot of producers that want that pulse - I like the pulse but that doesn't mean the snare has to be on two and four."

## What did you want on the album, drum-wise?

"I think my goal when we started the record was to find ways to bring rhythm to life but still have my personality and that tribal, gutsy, primitive drum circle. My favourite thing is when you put together a drum circle at Venice Beach in California, the girls show up. They like the incense and start dancing, you can't get that with anything else. That's the drum circle and I have that in my heart. I want to hear people feeling it."

## Your playing has always had a tribal element.

"I'm very attracted to toms, it's not all about the hi-hat, but I know the hi-hat frequency fits in certain spots in the mix. That's what it comes down to. The bass-line can cover frequencies so maybe I won't go to my floor tom. Maybe I'll play up on the higher drums and we'll both have a spot up in the mix. Why does the hi-hat have to go the whole time just because that's how you

were taught? In the mix you don't need something up in there the whole time. If you listen to good dance music it's not a consistent thing, it's patterns coming and going, ebb and flow. I wanted to take those influences into my drumming but also not forget me."

## You're clearly proud of *The Great Escape Artist*.

"When I listen to 'Ted, Just Admit It...' from *Nothing's Shocking* I can hear where the band was and what we were trying to achieve and we nailed it. That's what it's all about, trying to nail something. Even if I don't tell the guys I'm thinking reggae it's in my head, it's an approach and song-by-song I approached it differently. *The Great Escape Artist* is a great drum record for that reason with really solid decisions. There were no ifs, ands and buts about my drumming. Being surrounded by great musicians everyone has something to say about drum parts and every engineer says they do drums and they get the best drum sounds. It's all about drums when you first get to the studio. Everyone was listening to the drums and what the kick patterns were doing. Navarro hates when I swing, I can't stop swinging! So he'll listen to the hi-hat part and say, 'Wow, you're really swinging on that,' so I might pull back the swing and overdub a shaker for that swing so we can have it come and go. There's a track called 'Underground' that starts the record that is very straightforward and relentless, no fills, just a punch in the face. That to me is nice to be able to hold back the fills and when they're needed just machine-gun it."

## Where will your journey take you next?

"I always thought to be tribal was my destiny. It was Gene Krupa when I was a kid and it was all tom-tom. Later on you realise the toms were African-influenced and to see how those drummers approach it because they're not surrounded by a drumset but by djembes. That's what I want to do. I want to take things around me that aren't drumset-related and bring it to the drums. My house has steel drums, xylophone, timpani and when I sit there for an hour and make melodies, when I get to the kit I'm a different drummer. I hear the toms differently. I was really trying to stay open-minded to the full frequency and how to serve the song but also bring my personality to the surface so you go, 'That's Stephen Perkins.' I don't want to hide myself."

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Jane's Addiction, Porno For Pyros, Banyan

### CLASSIC CUTS: Jane's

Addiction *Nothing's Shocking*

(1988), Jane's Addiction *Ritual De Lo Habitual* (1991), Jane's Addiction *Strays* (2002)







# Steve White

The Modfather's right-hand man for 25 years, Steve played with Paul Weller in Style Council and on his biggest solo records. He remains a popular figure in the UK drum community

WORDS: DAVID WEST

Steve White grew up listening to a potent blend of American jazz and British pop. Since he first picked up a pair of drumsticks at the age of nine, he has scarcely been without them. Fresh out of high school he was offered the chance to study drumming in the US, either at Berklee College or the Percussion Institute of Technology, but lacking the funds to satisfy the stringent requirements of the US immigration authorities meant he had to stay in the UK, which turned out to be no bad thing. He was thrust into the limelight while still in his teens when he landed the drummer's spot in The Style Council, the band formed by Paul Weller after he left The Jam. When the '90s rolled around and Weller launched his solo career, he reunited with Steve.

## When you went into the Style Council audition, was Paul Weller there?

"Yeah, he was there with Mick Talbot. I'd kind of known Mick from my days as a little drummer playing at the Albany Empire in Deptford, as Mick used to play there with his band The Bureau. Paul said, 'Thing is mate, I've already got a drummer for this thing I'm doing on Saturday so I don't know if I'm going to be needing anyone.' I was quite pushy about it, I said, 'I've come all this way, so can you at least hear me?' He said, 'Yeah, okay.' I said, 'What are you into at the moment?' He said, 'I'm listening to quite a lot of Blue Note and Art Blakey,' so I did this ridiculously bad Elvin Jones impression and he went, 'That's pretty good, mate. What are you doing tomorrow?' I said, 'I'm doing nothing.' He said, 'If you can get up to the BBC at Maida Vale, we're doing a session for Radio One.' Bear in mind this was one of Britain's biggest stars and, after a minute's worth of listening to me doing a bad Elvin impression, he had just offered me a radio session. When we got to Radio One, he was still writing the song. It was 'The Paris Match', and I played it after knowing these guys for 30 minutes. I was 17."

## Is it true that you were never officially a member of The Style Council?

"I've never actually officially been a member of anything because when Paul works he'll call you up and say, 'Right, I'm going in the studio. Are you up for it, Whitey?' That's been the basis of our relationship for 25 years: 'I'm going on tour, are you up for it, Whitey?' It keeps you on your toes, but Paul wants everyone to be in the same space to make the music and sometimes contractual obligations and all that kind of stuff can actually get in the way of the creative process. He takes care of business the way he takes care of business, and it's all very much, 'If you're up for it, let's go and do it.'"

## Why did you take a break from working with Paul in the late 1980s?

"When I pulled away from The Style Council, which was about 1988, Paul was getting into dance music, and he

was checking out a lot of early garage and Chicago house. He was experimenting with drum machines, and once that word got mentioned I was like, 'Yep, okay, so I'm going off to learn my trade.' That was when I started studying with Bob Armstrong because there were so many shortfalls in my technique. That break was brilliant, I was able to spend two years intensely studying with Bob. It coincided with when Paul did his house album and The Style Council fizzled out."

## How did you get back to working with Paul?

"We met up to do this one last TV thing. He said, 'Listen, I've got my mojo back, I want to get the guitar out again,' and we did some demos. He had Peter Wilson as the producer, a lovely guy, produced a lot of Style Council stuff. The first thing he said is, 'Right, I'm going to program the bass drum and just have you play top kit on it.' I said, 'I'll hang around for today but that's not really what I want to do.' We did a couple of tracks and then Paul said, 'I've got this new idea that I want to put down. It's not going to be p\*\*sing around with programmed bass drums. I just want you to play.' It was called 'Into Tomorrow' - the tune that re-launched Paul back into the mainstream with his guitar in his hand again. We recorded it in a day, there was no producer, we just worked with an engineer. It came out on Paul's own label, because he didn't have a record deal.

"We started touring, and we toured and we toured and toured some more. We were doing it old-style, building a following. We'd do a gig in Cardiff at St David's Hall and it would be half full. We'd come back a year later and it would be sold out. It got bigger and bigger. We did Glastonbury in 1994 and Elvis Costello was going on after us and, just as we walked off, Elvis walked past Paul and went, 'You bastard.' We knew we'd done a great job."

## You spent some time working together with the late, great Ian Dury...

"Ian was a real supporter of mine during that whole period of time that drum machines were ruling the roost. He took me under his wing a little bit. We used to rehearse in his flat in Hammersmith and he used to have one of Nigel Olsen's old Slingerland kits, a big chrome monster. I did an album with him that was the soundtrack for a musical that he had written that went into the West End at the Royal Court Theatre. So I got to be a pit drummer. It didn't get great reviews but it was a great experience. Sadly, we lost Ian far too early."

## How did the Jazz Renegades come about, and how was playing with those guys different to what you had done before?

"The Jazz Renegades was actually just a fun thing that we used to do. We used to play at the Wag Club and all these cool bars in London, and we went to Japan.

"We got a record out on Verve in America, which was a big buzz for me because obviously Buddy Rich

was a Verve artist for a long time, so that was a real achievement. I'm an English pop drummer and that's the way I class myself. I'm never going to give Bill Stewart or Keith Carlock a run for their money, but I really enjoy playing in that swing style. We did pretty well at it, we sold some records, we made four albums and it was great fun. When you're out there doing it with no responsibilities, you'll play all the time, you'll play anywhere."

## You've been an avid drum collector for years... Do you have any particular favourites?

"One would have to be my mint condition White Marine Pearl Rogers Dynasonic, which has a double layer of lacquer on the inside, but no internal dampener. I bought it from my good friend Steve Maxwell - one of the world's most knowledgeable experts - and, even though he can't say definitely, Steve has suggested that a drum of that spec would probably have been built for someone like Buddy Rich, or Louie Bellson. I also have a very special 14"x5½" Slingerland White Marine Pearl Radio King Cloud Badge that I used recently at the World's Greatest Drummer event in Northampton. And when I used it on the Family Silver record, the producer literally just showed it the mic and the sound dived down. Another favourite would be a prototype Modern Classic maple snare. It's a one-piece maple shell - built by Johnny Craviotto, but with Premier hardware - and that's the snare I used pretty much exclusively during my last two years with Paul."

## In what ways do you think your playing has evolved over the years?

"Technically, it has probably gotten worse because I don't get the time to constantly blitz the technical side of my playing. I would throw this out as a piece of advice to younger guys and girls: while you're in your formative years there is no pressure - you should be doing all your practice and getting that wood-shedding under your belt, because once life kicks in and you have responsibilities, looking after yourself, having to get out of your mum and dad's house, then things like practice can become hard to do. That's one of the things that I talk about with the contemporaries that I'm privileged to know around the world: we never get enough time to practise. I think I'm a better musician and probably a far worse drummer!" **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

The Style Council,  
Paul Weller

**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Style  
Council *Café Bleu* (1984),

Paul Weller *Stanley Road* (1995)





# Gene Krupa

Krupa cast a giant shadow over 20th Century drumming. He was at various times a movie star, a jailbird and a legend, but above all he was a drummer. . .

WORDS: CHRIS WELCH

**C**arnegie Hall, New York City, 16 January 1938. An eager audience is keyed up with excitement, awaiting the first jazz concert at this prestigious classical music venue. The Benny Goodman Band launch into their opening number, 'Don't Be That Way'. The drummer pushes the beat with urgent press rolls, but the band are edgy, afraid of cutting loose. Then comes a split-second drum break, a dazzling blitzkrieg of cymbal and snare drum violence, hotly pursued by a battering offbeat. The audience immediately goes wild. Even the musicians yell encouragement. Gene Krupa has broken the ice and worked his percussive magic. Swing is here!

The man who electrified that celebrated Benny Goodman concert became the most famous drummer in the world. As well as being an innovative soloist, armed with tremendous speed and stamina, Gene Krupa was a charismatic figure. Fans were thrilled by the tousle-haired, gum-chewing drummin' man with movie star good looks. Gene was always an extrovert who hit hard and played loud. As a teenager, he insisted on his bass drum being recorded, even when engineers thought it was impossible. When he played 'Sing, Sing, Sing' with the Benny Goodman Band, his roaring tom-toms rekindled the African spirit of jazz. Drummers from Buddy Rich to John Bonham idolised Krupa, and his

the drums than the saxophone. He showed such ability that his older brother Pete bought him a set of traps.

Gene grew up listening to the New Orleans drummers and the enthusiastic young local musicians playing Chicago-style jazz, like sax player Bud Freeman and drummer Dave Tough. When Tough left his band, The Blue Friars, Gene was offered the gig. At last he could play regularly with a real jazz band. Although self-taught, he took advice from Dave Tough on tuning the drums, choosing the right cymbals and playing them tonally to complement the instruments in the band. He also studied hand-to-hand press rolls, as performed by the New Orleans drummers. In 1925 he took lessons from drum teacher Roy C Knapp and joined the musicians union. Now he could play in bars and clubs like the Three Deuces, where gangsters often engaged in gunplay and fights broke out. One of the regulars who jammed at the club was teenage clarinet prodigy Benny Goodman. Gene teamed up with the McKenzie-Condon Chicagoans for a recording date, and it wasn't long before many of the Chicagoans, including guitarist Eddie Condon, Benny Goodman and Gene headed for the Big Apple. Gigs were hard to come by, but Gene found work in theatres and rapidly began to build up a strong reputation.

In January 1930, Krupa played alongside Glenn Miller in the orchestra for the Broadway show *Strike Up*

told A&R man John Hammond: "I'll never work for that son of a bitch again!"

By 1934 Gene was working for a 'commercial' band in Chicago, which at least provided a regular income. Back in New York, Goodman was planning an exciting new band and desperately wanted Krupa to join. Gene was the only man who could really make it swing.

John Hammond (who much later discovered Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen) enticed Krupa back from Chicago, explaining that Benny's new band would be playing top arrangements by Fletcher Henderson. After a particularly dull gig, Krupa agreed to join the new Benny Goodman Orchestra in December 1934. The band began making regular appearances on a live radio show. The show, *Let's Dance*, was heard from coast to coast and these broadcasts sowed the seeds of acceptance for swing music. Armed with trumpet soloists Ziggy Elman and Harry James, the band developed an attacking sound of its own. On the road, they often developed 'head arrangements' - one of the most famous was 'Sing, Sing, Sing' which developed into a marathon epic built around Gene's dramatic tom rhythms. As well as sparking the big band, Krupa also drove The Benny Goodman Trio and Quartet, the latter featuring vibraphone genius Lionel Hampton. The small groups made dozens of exciting recordings, with Gene blowing up a storm with sticks and wire brushes on tunes like 'Dizzy Spells', 'China Boy' and 'Runnin' Wild'.

## SWING, SWING, SWING

At first the brash Goodman-Krupa sound shocked ballroom managers, who threatened to cancel gigs and demanded their money back. A nationwide tour seemed doomed to failure, and Goodman was on the verge of packing up. Krupa urged him to keep going. When the band arrived at the Palomar Ballroom, Los Angeles, an audience of college kids gave them an ovation. When they played the Paramount Theatre in New York in March 1937, 3,000 fans danced in the aisles, while another 3,000 tried to get in. The 1938 Carnegie Hall concert saw the drummer get almost as much hero worship as the leader.

The clarinettist began to resent the way audiences cheered and applauded Krupa and Goodman began to restrict Krupa's solos, ordering him to play brushes instead of sticks and looking bored on stage while Krupa was playing. They couldn't even agree over the tempos. The row went on for several shows, with both men arguing in public. Eventually, Krupa quit the band.

Within weeks he had formed the Gene Krupa Orchestra, signed to MCA and made his debut at the Steel Pier ballroom in Atlantic City, on 16 April 1938. The new band went down a storm in front of 4,000 fans. His band was hugely popular and became even hotter when the added Anita O'Day and Roy Eldridge in 1941. The trumpet player had recorded several sides with Krupa in the '30s including 'I Hope Gabriel Likes My Music' and 'Swing Is Here'. It wasn't long before The Krupa Band was

## AN INNOVATIVE SOLOIST WITH SPEED AND STAMINA, KRUPA'S ROARING TOM-TOMS REKINDLED THE AFRICAN SPIRIT OF JAZZ

influence was felt well beyond the swing era.

Gene's playing career spanned five decades of jazz history, but it wasn't until he joined Benny Goodman's band in late 1934 that his fame began to spread. The Krupa became an explosive mix of ego clashes and dramatic incidents. Frequent onstage rows with Goodman and a heavily publicised drugs bust were just some of the incidents that put him in the headlines. Yet Krupa was far from being the 'drug crazed jazz fiend' the press tried to portray. He was dignified, quietly religious, proud of his achievements and sensitive to criticism.

### THE EARLY YEARS

Gene Krupa was born in Chicago on 15 January, 1909, the youngest of six children. Brought up a Catholic, Gene's mother wanted him to become a priest. However, at the age of 10 he took a part-time job as an errand boy in a local music store. Growing up on Chicago's notoriously tough South Side, he could have got caught up in the local street gangs. Instead, he listened to all the latest jazz records in the store, took up the alto sax and began playing with The Frivolians, a high school junior band. One night, after a rehearsal, he tried out the band's drum kit. It was then that he decided he'd much sooner play

*The Band.* Gene couldn't read the drum score and Glenn had to help him out by humming the parts. Gene was determined to learn how to read. He took lessons with Sanford E Moeller - the finest teacher in New York - and also learnt how to use his arms in a flailing motion to add more power. It was this combination of power and visual appeal that made him so popular. Composer George Gershwin pronounced Krupa his favourite show drummer. Said Gene later, "I didn't have the right technique. I resolved to learn the drums from the bottom up. I used to practise seven hours a day."

A big influence on Gene was the contrapuntal playing of Vishnadrass Shirali, who played 12 drums for Hindu dancer Uday Shan-Kar. Krupa also heard African drumming on recordings made by explorers in the Belgian Congo. Years later, when he became the leader of his own big band, he would give each musician a small tom-tom to play. And one young drummer who saw the Krupa Band beating out African-style cross-rhythms was none other than Max Roach.

In 1932, Gene was booked to play with crooner Russ Colombo's band. The 'fixer' turned out to be Benny Goodman, who insisted that Krupa only play wire brushes. The restriction infuriated the drummer. He





hitting the charts with 'Drummin' Man' and 'Drum Boogie'. Gene and Anita also cooked up hip vocal and instrumental numbers like 'Let Me Off Up Town' and 'Bolero At The Savoy', while Gene was showcased on 'Wire Brush Stomp' and 'Blue Rhythm Fantasy'.

Such was his popularity, Hollywood beckoned. Krupa showed his ability as an actor and was able to deliver lines with ease, notably in Bob Hope's 1938 movie *Some Like It Hot* and in 1941's *Ball Of Fire* with Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck. In one scene, Gene plays paradiddles on a match box with a pair of matches. On the last beat, he strikes them with a flourish and they burst into flame. It was a neat trick that thrilled wartime movie audiences.

### FALL AND RISE

Despite all his public success, Gene's personal life was in turmoil. He split with his wife Ethel in 1941 and had to pay her a settlement of \$100,000. Worse was to come. In 1943, Gene fell victim to a drugs bust that almost ruined his career. He endured two trials and an 84-day jail term which shattered him. The drugs issue was grossly exaggerated and the effects of the imprisonment and bad publicity were a source of great distress. In August 1943 he was released on bail, pending an appeal, and finally freed when the charges were dropped.

Gene felt like giving up appearing in public after the experience, and planned to teach and write music. The jail sentence had ruined Krupa, but it brought about a reconciliation with Ethel. She helped him out financially and they remarried in 1947. He was even offered his old job back with Benny Goodman and he returned to the stage in September 1943. He was grateful to Benny, but switched to Tommy Dorsey's band rather than risk a nationwide Goodman tour where he might be greeted by placard-waving moralists.

When he sneaked onstage at the Paramount Theatre with Dorsey, fans recognised him and cheered. Krupa burst into tears. But he was back behind a kit of drums, where he belonged. It wasn't long before Gene formed another band of his own in 1944. Inspired by Dorsey, Gene added a 10-piece string section and even brought in another drummer to play while he conducted. This idea didn't go down too well with fans or the press and Gene got fed up, especially when the strings couldn't keep in tune with the brass. He finally returned to a regular band in the summer of 1945.

By 1946, bebop was spreading beyond New York's 52nd Street clubs. Gene listened to the new music being played by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and accepted the need for change. He brought in bop trumpeter Red Rodney and featured modern arrangements by Eddie Finckel and Gerry Mulligan on tunes like 'Bird House', 'Disc Jockey Jump' and 'Up And Atom'. Gene worked surprisingly well in this context and soloed effectively on 'Lover' and 'Higher Than The Moon'. On one of his best numbers, 'Leave Us Leap', he utilised the 'freeze beat', a trick Krupa had picked up playing for dancers.

Krupa kept his band going until 1951, but crooners and rhythm and blues were ousting big bands. At one stage, in desperation, he began to play country and western music, although his musicians rebelled and threatened to quit. The band finally broke up and Gene began touring with tenor saxophonist Charlie Ventura, playing heavily-styled versions of tunes like 'Dark Eyes', 'St Louis Blues' and 'Body And Soul'. Although often panned by the critics for being too showy, their trio was enormously popular.



In the '50s Gene joined Norman Granz's Jazz At The Philharmonic touring troupe. He was featured with a quartet and often engaged in drum battles with Buddy Rich. His playing on these dates was increasingly erratic and lacked control. In March 1953 Gene came to Britain with Jazz At The Phil for a special flood relief concert. They played at the Gaumont State, Kilburn and the late jazz writer Benny Green recalled the show. "Nobody who saw the concert will forget the sight of Krupa, dwarfed by his own giant shadow behind him, playing like a man possessed."

In 1954 Gene set up a drum school with Cozy Cole in New York and also went on a tour of Australia. The following year he filmed a guest appearance in *The Glenn Miller Story* playing alongside Cozy Cole in a jam session with Louis Armstrong on 'Basin Street Blues'. Hollywood duly attempted to equal the success of this biopic by making *The Benny Goodman Story*. This entailed a reunion with Goodman, and Gene reprised his solo on 'Sing, Sing, Sing' for the movie's soundtrack.

In 1959 the drummer was portrayed by Sal Mineo in another Hollywood film *Drum Crazy*, *The Gene Krupa Story*. Sal made a good stab at the role and a fascinating promo film made at the time showed the two drummers rehearsing and jamming together. However, the movie was full of anachronisms and has since fallen into obscurity. It depicted Gene as a crazy guy, prone to dropping his sticks and smashing up his drums. Astonishingly there was no reference to Benny Goodman (due to contractual reasons), which made it impossible to feature many of the highlights of Gene's own career.

In 1960 Gene had a heart attack and doctors warned him to take life more easily. Typically he carried on playing and recorded an excellent album with Charlie Ventura, *The New Gene Krupa Quartet* in 1964. He also toured Japan, Mexico and South America. In 1967 he said he felt 'lousy' and admitted his playing wasn't so hot. After a period of retirement, he was reunited with the original members of the Benny Goodman Quartet for an album called *Together Again*.

During most of the '60s Gene played with his quartet at the Metropole Bar in New York. One night, Benny

Goodman dropped in unannounced and sat in without being invited. "Brushes, please..." said BG. Gene went white with fury but played as he was bidden.

Gene's last gigs with The Benny Goodman Quartet were in 1973. They included a return appearance at Carnegie Hall as part of the Newport Jazz Festival. Although Gene played with all the energy at his command, he was clearly very ill. A hospital check revealed he was suffering from leukaemia and he had to undergo a course of blood transfusions and chemotherapy. As if this wasn't bad enough, early in 1973 Gene's home in Yonkers was badly damaged by fire. All of his precious records, tapes, drums and memorabilia from a lifetime in music was destroyed in the blaze.

The last performance by the Goodman Quartet was in Saratoga Springs, New York on 18 August 1973. Two months later, on 16 October 1973, Gene Krupa died at home in bed at the age of 64. Tributes poured in from fellow drummers, but it was left to his old sparring partner Buddy Rich to put his contribution into perspective. "Gene was the inspiration for every big name drummer in the business. At one time every drummer in the world wanted to play like Gene Krupa." A suitably adept appraisal of Gene's enormous influence as a man, an icon and, above all else, a true rhythm king. **R**

### ESSENTIALS



#### RELATED ARTISTS:

Gene Krupa, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Buddy Rich, Charlie Ventura  
**CLASSIC CUTS:** Benny

Goodman *Live At Carnegie Hall* (1938), Gene Krupa Orchestra *Drum Boogie* (1940), Gene Krupa Orchestra *Uptown* (1941), Gene Krupa & Buddy Rich *Krupa And Rich* (1955), Gene Krupa Quartet *The Great New Gene Krupa Quartet Featuring Charlie Ventura* (1964)



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# Josh Freese

The go-to guy for any band in need of great rock drumming, Josh Freese has become one of the world's most in-demand session players

WORDS: JORDAN MCLACHLAN

**S**ure, his enviable CV makes for an incredible read – featuring as it does everyone from Devo to Guns N' Roses, A Perfect Circle to Lostprophets – but he's not had a charmed life. The brilliance of Josh's professional career is the result of a remarkable work ethic. Not for him the lazy mornings getting over the night before or long holidays after gruelling tours. Instead Josh has filled, and continues to fill, his diary with (almost) every offer of work that comes in, thriving on the variety and challenges that each session brings. Of course his killer groove, ability with odd time and his wicked way with fills help... Most recently he's toured with Paramore, but when *Rhythm* interviewed Josh in 2005, he'd just been playing with one Gordon Sumner...

## What was that first meeting with Sting like?

"I went to the show and figured that I'd maybe get the chance to say hi and that we'd fix up a meeting after that. But in the end I was taken backstage and Sting and I sat down and talked for about 45 minutes. That was a pretty surreal first meeting, I must admit. I was always such a huge Police fan that I couldn't quite believe that I was sat there chatting to Sting.

"When we'd finished talking I got up to leave and Sting said, 'I hope to see you at rehearsals in the spring.' At that point I didn't fully appreciate what was going on, but that was it as far as Sting was concerned – I'd been recommended to him, we'd met and clicked, and he was inviting me to go and rehearse with the band. Sting doesn't do auditions, it would seem. He relies completely on recommendations from people that he trusts. The way that Keith Carlock got the gig before me was the same – Sting was looking for someone and Vinnie Colaiuta told him he should check out Keith. And that was it, simple as that."

## Had Sting checked out any of the albums that you've played on?

"I've recorded hundreds of albums with different people over the years, so he might have checked out a couple, but I'm really not sure. He obviously knows whose opinions he can trust now, so if someone says, 'Josh would be perfect for this band,' he'll take it on trust. You know the coolest thing? Both Sting and Dominic [Miller, longtime Sting guitarist] have kids in their 20s and they both, independently, said to me that when they mentioned to their kids that they were getting Josh Freese from A Perfect Circle in on drums the kids were like, 'Oh man, that's so cool, A Perfect Circle are amazing.' That was a great vote of confidence from a younger audience."

## You had some pretty big shoes to fill taking on this gig, Vinnie Colaiuta's to start with...

"Every drummer Sting's ever played with has been world class. I mean, look at the list – Stewart Copeland, Manu Katché, Omar Hakim, Vinnie, Keith. They're all

incredible and it's a very intimidating situation to find yourself in, being asked to step into those shoes. These guys are some of my favourite players in the world. And there were moments when I found myself thinking, 'What if I show up and fall flat on my face?'

"So I really did my homework before I left for the rehearsals. I listened through to everything and wrote out all my little charts. And of course, as soon as we got into the rehearsal room it all went out of the window – Sting changes things up all the time. So we would be playing songs and he'd drop intros, leave out the second verse, double the length of a solo, and so on. I'd heard he liked to do this, even in soundcheck before an evening's gig. It's great because it keeps everything fresh and exciting, but a lot of my careful preparation was for nothing. He kept me on my toes, for sure."

## How did you approach the job of learning the songs? Did you try to get them note for note?

"I'm such a massive fan of both Vinnie and Stewart in particular that I've stolen things from both of them. In terms of the way that I play I fit in between the two of them. I'm not as 'choppy' as Vinnie but I'm a little more schooled than Stewart and I guess the things I do fit with what Sting wants to do at the moment. The way I approach my parts really depends on the song. There are certain fills and signature grooves that have to stay and I'll play them exactly as Stewart or whoever played them. But Stewart wouldn't play fills the same way every night, so there's room to play things differently and bring some of how I'm feeling to the song.

"One of the funniest things about preparing the songs for the rehearsals was that I'd try and get all the fills down. So we'd be in the studio going round the tunes and there'd be occasions where I'd be nailing certain fills from the records and feeling pleased with myself, and Sting would turn around and say to me, 'Y'know, I always hated what Stewart did there – can you play something else?'"

## So you were allowed input into what you played on each track?

"Yeah. Sting's very open-minded, which I was pleasantly surprised about. When we started working together he would ask me what I thought about certain sections or arrangements, and he'd listen to what I had to say. It's far from Sting telling everyone what to do. At the heart of it, Sting's a bassist. That's who he is. You can forget he's a multi-millionaire celebrity rock star. When he's working in the studio rehearsing with the band, he's a bass player. He's never forgotten that and that's why he's never become lazy and why he still loves to interact with other players and seek their input."

## That must have been a dream for a big Police fan like yourself...

"There are other big rock legends that might ask me to play with them and I wouldn't always say yes. If I'm not

into it I don't always take a gig for the sake of making money. But with Sting I was such a big Police fan that it really is like a dream come true. I loved The Police when I first heard them as a kid, and as I grew as a musician I continued to appreciate them and understand more about what amazing musicians they were. Once it was clear that I was going to join the band, Sting sent me an email saying, 'Here's the stuff you should be familiar with – let's start with these and the ones that sound good we'll keep.' I laughed because I already knew every song on that list. His songs are just a part of a musician's vocabulary now – part of pop history."

## How is it that you manage to maintain not only the pace of your workload, but also the hunger to play drums and make music?

"I really try not to take anything for granted. I've been playing drums professionally for a long time, but I do try to appreciate every opportunity that I'm given. It does feel normal after all this time and you do get used to working with great people on great music, but I try to keep a perspective on it all and realise that I'm really lucky to be doing what I'm doing. Which is easy to do when you get a call from Sting.

"There are tons of drummers that I know that really don't work that much. So I know that I'm lucky to be in my position. I'm always flattered that people ask me to play on their records. Even if it's some weird, obscure band that I've never heard of, I'm always appreciative of the fact that they want me to play drums for them.

"I have friends who are rock stars, like Adrian Young from No Doubt, who have sold like, 35 million records. But I've never been in the situation of being in a band that's sold that much. I think because I've never experienced that level of success, I've never become lazy. I still always feel I have something to prove. It's great that I've received recognition from other drummers and that means a lot to me, but I've got a way to go. I've been close to 'making it' before, but it's never quite materialised, which has been a big motivating factor to me." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

A Perfect Circle, Sting, Paramore, Lostprophets, The Vandals, Guns N' Roses, Devo, Paul Westerberg,

Avril Lavigne, The Offspring, Weezer, Nine Inch Nails

**CLASSIC CUTS:** The Vandals *Fear Of A Punk Planet* (1990), A Perfect Circle *Thirteenth Step* (2003), Lostprophets *Liberation Transmission* (2006)





# Bernard Purdie

Bernard 'Pretty' Purdie is a giant in drumming whose career has spanned over six decades of soul, funk and R&B and thousands of recording sessions

WORDS: SIMON BRAUND

**T**here are several drummers, Hal Blaine included, who have posted a convincing claim to the title of World's Most Recorded Drummer. Bernard 'Pretty' Purdie's own estimate is around the 3,000 mark. His resume makes exhausting reading, with a list of credits that includes James Brown, Otis Redding, Miles Davis, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, Dizzy Gillespie, Branford Marsalis, Paul Simon, Steely Dan, Jeff Beck, King Curtis and Aretha Franklin. Having Purdie on your team has long been viewed as a career enhancing coup.

But what defines Purdie as an extraordinary musician is not the punch-holes in his time card, but the unparalleled quality of the work he has turned in during those thousands of hours in the booth. And moreover the broadness of the canvas on which his talent has been, and is still, displayed.

## STARTING YOUNG

Bernard Purdie was born in Elkton, Maryland on 11 June 1939. He began his education as a drummer at the age of seven under the tutelage of Leonard Heyward.

"He was a fascinating man," remembers Purdie. "He allowed me to have free lessons for seven years; I sat on the step while the others were paying. Basically I didn't exist, except when he wanted to make an example; I had to show the guys how to play something. As soon as I'd finished I'd be back to the step. But anything that I didn't understand I would write down and ask him about after the lesson was over. In essence, I had lessons every day for seven years because I was sitting in on everybody else's lessons."

"All I ever wanted to do was music, and I've done every kind of job you can think of just so I could stay in music. I worked ditches; I worked the garden fence, the sewers, the railroad; I've been a chef. It didn't matter, as long as I could continue to play music."

It paid off and he was soon playing professional gigs. At 12 he led his own band called Jackie Lee And The Angels. Jackie Lee was, of course, a front: the white guy who got them the bookings when no one would touch an integrated band led by a black man, let alone a boy of 12. However, it was Purdie who ran the show.

"It was my band," he says. "I signed all the contracts, and I handled all the money. But Jackie Lee was the guitar player and he had to be out front. That was just the way it was. If you were going to have an interracial band, the white guy had to be at the front."

Surprisingly, The Angels were a hillbilly band, playing music straight out of the backwoods. Down and dirty country music that was far away from the glorious funk, soul and jazz of Purdie's later career. But it was his dedication to playing music that saw him jumping with the rednecks, and it was by no means the most unusual gig he took on his way to the top.

"I played circus and carnival music," he says, "and that's where the precision came from. Doing that gave

me the real discipline of being right on it. You couldn't mess up because of all the people who were working; you couldn't ad lib and that bothered me because I always wanted to put something of myself in."

He took his lumps, though, and the discipline of playing for the circus, sitting in with touring musicians and a growing interest in pop music, big band and jazz, planted the seeds of the Purdie style.

"They all said I had something, every one of them," he says of the band leaders and singers who would occasionally grant him a one-song shot at his dream. "At the time, nobody would explain what it was I had; they all said I had *something*, but I still had to go back to the woodshed. I said, 'But I can do the job.' I always felt I could do the job and it took years for me to understand about doing the job and woodshedding. You woodshed on things you don't know, not on the things you do know. Why didn't they just say that to me? I always practised what I knew so everybody would know that I could do it. But you've got to practise what you *don't* know, to add to your vocabulary; to add to your knowledge, to add to everything that you're trying to do. But if you don't know that, and nobody takes the time to tell you, you're going to do what I did: sit down and practise what you know. But I also had to learn patience, because I've always been a very impatient person, and that was very hard for me. You have to understand that it takes time to create a strong base."

## THE PURDIE SHUFFLE

From that strong base has emanated one of the sweetest and most arresting drumming styles of the last five decades. His versatility is astonishing, but Purdie's signature adorns every groove he's ever played. And as with all great musicians, what you hear, what sounds so smooth and so simple and so right, is the issue of many different elements, all threaded together to describe the sublime: dedication, hard work, luck, the right influences at the right time, the right choices, the right company and massive, intangible talent - the right stuff. And, easy though it is to be seduced by Purdie's effortless grace, his perfect punctuation, he doesn't underestimate the most gruelling factor of all.

"You learn your craft first," he states emphatically. "Then you learn your rhythms, not the reverse. But most people do not understand that. The way most people see it is that they know a couple of songs and the first thing they want to do is go out and play, and they think they have the groove together. No, it takes time to learn how to switch from one idiom to another; it takes time to be able to turn it on and turn it off, it takes time to become an instant groove maker."

Purdie moved to New York in 1960 and scored his first hit with King Curtis. This in turn led to work with Aretha Franklin, James Brown and his tenure with the Atlantic Records house band, during which time he became a pioneer of funk - and to this day he

remains one of its greatest exponents.

"I never described myself as an inventor, but I would definitely like to be thought of as a pioneer. The point to me is that what I came up with was how to incorporate the Purdie Shuffle, and to make it work as a way of tying all the music together. Making the undercurrents of funk and soul the same thing. I learnt how the undercurrent of the music could be just as dominant an effect as the backbeat, so you don't lose it. And that's the hard part. I realised that you can do anything, make anything happen, if you know what you're doing."

"I knew my craft when I was eight, 10, 12 years old. I started to learn about rhythms then. And taking those rhythms into consideration meant that rhythm and blues, country, latin, jazz, swing, soul, funk were all one kind of music. The only thing that changes is the rhythm. That was how I perceived things, that's why I did what I did. And my teacher told me that what I was doing would work one day, because music does have a broad base, a solid foundation that you can build on."

Asked about his time playing with James Brown, Purdie says: "It was fun, but sometimes a pain in the neck. James knew what he wanted, every time. You either gave him what he wanted or you left him alone, you got out. The problem that most drummers have dealing with James Brown is that they don't know their craft the best way. I loved it because I knew that I had to be right on. The groove was there, but the precision had to be there too. And for me, I also had to watch his butt and his legs and his feet. But James, and Otis Redding, they were minors when it came to body movements. By this time I already had under my belt 15 years of striptease. Following the motions of the body, I had all that down; I had all that when I was a teenager. But that's the way of life. In the circus I learnt how to follow the clowns and the high-wire act, the precision that you had to achieve. But that's the kind of stuff you learn, the things you don't forget, and you put them to use as you go along."

"It's all music to me. I don't go through changes; I have liked all kinds of music and I've never had a problem. I used to do marches from New Orleans; I've been doing New Orleans-style playing since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, because I have always liked to march." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



### RELATED ARTISTS:

Aretha Franklin, King Curtis, James Brown, Steely Dan

### CLASSIC CUTS: Aretha

Franklin *Young, Gifted And*

*Black* (1969), King Curtis *Live At Filmore West* (1971), Steely Dan *Aja* (1977)





James Cumiskey

# Taylor Hawkins

It can't be easy being Dave Grohl's drummer but, since joining the band in 1998, Foo Fighters' Queen-loving sticksman has made the gig his own

WORDS: LOUISE KING/RHYTHM

**B**ack in July 1996, *Rhythm*'s cover star was an up and coming drummer who'd just landed a plum job with mega-selling Canadian songstress Alanis Morissette. "Ladies and gentlemen," we trumpeted by way of introduction, "we proudly present the soon to be legendary Taylor Hawkins." And how right we were.

"Ending up on drums was just default really," he told *Rhythm* in 1996. "My next door neighbour had this kit and he'd show me a beat and I'd pick it up really quick and he'd be like, 'Man you should play drums, it's so natural for you.' I was like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, but I want to play guitar.' Then I found out how long it takes and what a pain in the ass it is... No, seriously, drums were just really easy for me, and in the end I think they were more natural for my personality.

"I had one or two lessons and f\*\*\*in' hated it. So I'd say the three albums I learned to play drums to were Queen's *Live Killers*, The Police's *Zenyatta Mondatta* and The Specials album."

Taylor remains a massive fan of Roger Taylor to this day - becoming good friends with the Queen legend and persuading him and Brian May to guest on the second album of Taylor's side-project The Coattail Riders. But back in 1996, Taylor also expressed his admiration for a certain Dave Grohl. On the subject of his - unbeknownst to him - future boss, Taylor described Grohl's playing as, "F\*\*\*ing ridiculous - I love him for the simplicity and beauty in his playing, the fills that he does are damn great."

Then in 1998 Dave Grohl called up Taylor to ask if he knew any drummers who might be interested in filling the Foo Fighters' vacant drum throne. Taylor replied that yes, he did and promptly put himself forward for the job. Fourteen years, six albums and a bunch of in-drag turns in Foos videos later, he's as integral to the band's sound as Grohl himself. Despite this, he remains a thoroughly down-to-earth drummer who's taking nothing for granted.

"My biggest highlight," Taylor told *Rhythm* in 2010, "is actually just getting paid to play the drums - that still amazes me!"

*Rhythm* has featured Taylor many times, even inviting him to guest-edit the magazine in 2005, but the following interview was conducted with Taylor around the release of the Foos' fifth album *Echoes, Silence, Patience And Grace* in 2007.

*Echoes, Silence, Patience And Grace covers a lot of ground in terms of dynamics and arrangements, and it's Foo Fighters' most varied album to date. Talk us through how it came to be that way...*

"We haven't been ready to write a record like this until now. I know that Dave wouldn't have been comfortable putting violins on a song before. But for whatever reasons, it just felt like the right time to explore those things now. This is a pretty dynamic record, I think.

There's lots of lighter shades on it, alongside the big rock stuff. We've always done quieter sections within songs, of course, but I think this time we embraced the idea of really using arrangements in a more considered way. The last record [*In Your Honor*], obviously, was half heavy stuff, half acoustic songs. So it really was like two sides of the coin. It sounds obvious, but this time around we weren't afraid of incorporating everything into one song if it felt right."

*How do you think the album fits in with everything you've done with the Foo Fighters up to this point?*

"I think this record is better than our last one, certainly. There are good songs on both, but taken as a whole, I'm happier with this one than with *In Your Honor*. Having said that, I'm still real proud of what we did on that record, and 'Best Of You' [*In Your Honor's* big hit single] has served us real well! It's incredible when a song is received by people like that. I don't think I'll ever take things like that for granted. But I think it's just a case of this record standing up a little bit taller than what we've done in the past."

*How would you sum up the making of the record?*

"In some respects - and I don't like to use these words - this has been the slickest album that we've made so far. I don't mean in terms of the way it sounds or the production techniques or anything, just in the way that it felt 'right' in the way we approached it and the way it came together. And that did feel good. Sure, there are challenges in the studio and there were some different ways of doing things that felt a bit odd at the time. But when it's all done, you look back and realise that it's things like that that make you step your game up, that take you into different places."

*You're very much fans of classic rock bands, and that shows on this album. That kind of '70s rock vibe, where a record could feature chunky riffs next to a song delivered on finger-picked acoustic guitar, is very prevalent on Echoes...*

"We didn't approach this record like, 'This is a rock record!' It was just a case of picking the very best songs we had. And that obviously shapes how you record them, what sounds you go for.

"There are lots of '70s rock influences on there, stuff that we've always been into, but it came out more strongly on this record than it ever has done. We're huge fans of [Queen album] *A Night At The Opera*, of [Led Zeppelin's] *Physical Graffiti*, all that good stuff, of course. And I don't think we try and hide the influences that have shaped who we are.

"But at the same time we all have our own personalities on our instruments, and they're strong enough that when we play we always sound like the

Foo Fighters. I had a friend who heard our version of Wings' 'Band On The Run' recently and just said, 'Yeah, sounds like you guys.' Which is cool."

*Echoes... is also a record that rewards repeated listening. It's a densely layered, carefully structured album.*

"Oh, man - we just arranged, and arranged, and arranged some more on these songs. We never come in with too much of a preconceived notion of how we want the album to sound, we just follow instinct. And this time it just felt right to work on the details more than we ever had done. So what we have is a record where the performances really complement the songs - there's stuff that's a little more complex than your average rock album maybe, but it just adds a different dimension. And we made sure it still rocked, too!"

*Turning our attention to the tools used for the job, were the 'classic rock' drum tones on the album created using classic drums?*

"I used some old Gretsch drums in the studio, and some Tama. Oh, and some Ludwigs. I just love drums, and like to use different things for different sounds in the studio. But I have to say that the main kit on there was a vintage Gretsch, and I had thousands of snares to pick and choose from."

*You're in a band with one of the greatest rock drummers of your generation. You're presumably a fan of his, otherwise you wouldn't have taken the job. But who else has caught your ear of late?*

"Y'know, me and Dave were talking about Ronnie Vannucci from The Killers recently. He's a really fantastic drummer. I'd been listening to a lot of Cheap Trick and I said something to Dave about Ronnie reminding me of Bun E Carlos for some reason. I think they're both incredible drummers, and I don't think either of them get the credit they deserve. Bun E has this kind of second line thing going on with eighth notes on the left hand sometimes - it's just amazing, perfect drumming. So Ronnie and Bun E get my vote at this moment in time." **R**

## ESSENTIALS



**RELATED ARTISTS:** Foo Fighters, Taylor Hawkins & The Coattail Riders, Alanis Morissette

### CLASSIC CUTS:

Foo Fighters *There Is Nothing Left To Lose* (1998), Foo Fighters *In Your Honor* (2005), Foo Fighters *Wasting Light* (2011), Taylor Hawkins & The Coattail Riders *Red Light Fever* (2010)





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